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June/July 1995
Number 54

FIRST THINGS

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Robert H. Bork

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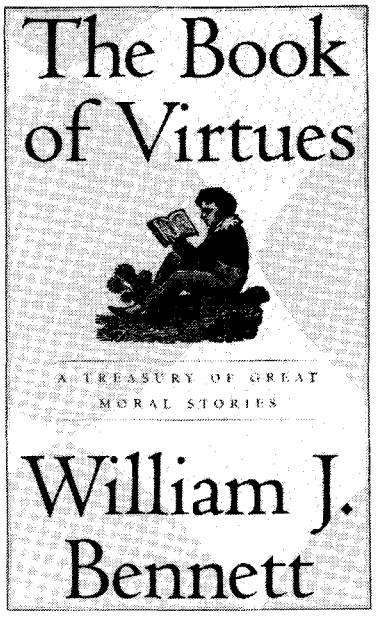

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FIRST THINGS

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June/July 1995 • Number 54

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Cautions About Utopia

I was much intrigued by the Patrick Glynn-Glenn Tinder exchange ("Time for Utopia?" March). As I read Mr. Glynn's rather buoyant piece, I wondered whether the citizens of Sarajevo or Grozny (what is left of it—and them) would want to join the party. To be sure, there have been remarkable advances in the treatment of previously excluded groups. We are more "handicap accessible" and less racially exclusive than we used to be: the "we" in question being the United States.

But the gulf between the earthly and heavenly cities, between Bonhoeffer's penultimate and ultimate realms, is by no means closing. For every advance one can point to a developing tragedy. For example: the teenage suicide rate in the United States has soared 154 percent from 1985 to 1991. There are plenty of dire statistics of this sort, all of them challenging a rush toward utopian congratulation.

My worry about the utopian tendency, or Mr. Glynn's utopian prospects, is not so much that he will pitch himself into the arms of one of those deadly ideologies whose primary monument is mounds of bodies, but that the tendency he underscores may invite an unwarranted insouciance concerning where we are and where we are going. Peaceful 1989 may have been. But the drama is far more complex than he allows. Communist parties are making a resurgence in Hungary and Poland. Yeltsin is on the ropes, and behaving horribly, in Russia. We Americans are busy hunkering down into monocultural shouting matches in the name of multiculturalism.

I appreciate the fact that I, as a "post-polio person," can find elevators where there were none and that my daughter, a young adult with mental retardation, is less likely now than when she was a child to be called a "retard" to her face. That is significant. But this is an occasion for hope and gratitude, not for flight into utopian optimism.

Albert Camus, evoked by Mr. Tinder, faced down charges from Jean-Paul Sartre that he was a gloomy pessimist because he didn't share Sartre's love of dictatorships as a way station to perfect justice and freedom by arguing that to label sober reflection "pessimistic" was puerile. He would remain, he said, pessimistic as to history but optimistic as to man or, better put, the human person. That sort of commitment is open to hope but resolutely critical of utopianism, whether of the left or the right.

Jean Bethke Elshtain
University of Chicago
Chicago, IL

Patrick Glynn's Christian utopianism strikes me, perhaps unfairly, as a pipe dream. It is not that no moral progress can be made in history. Societies can get better and sometimes do, but only if people get better on a sufficiently large scale. There is no law of history that guarantees or even suggests that they will get better and remain so.

I remember reading somewhere that every generation is faced with a new invasion of the barbarians—its own children. The battle to civilize them and to lead them to salvation is unending, and not always successful. The present generation is as good an illustration of this truth as any in history.

Society and its institutions can corrupt individuals; they can also help them to grow morally and spiritually. But ultimately moral growth or decay depends on the choices of free persons. So, in the final analysis, does the moral improvement or decline of social institutions; they can become better, but not unless people make them so. Progress in history is the result of individual conversions to the good.

One may believe, as I most certainly do, that people will make good choices only with the help of God and the aid of His grace. But, as St. Angela Merici said some 450 years ago, "God has given everyone liberty, and therefore He compels no one, but only points the way, calls, and persuades." Without our consent, soci-

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eties do not become good—and I know of no law by which we can predict human choices.

Francis Canavan, S.J.
Fordham University
Bronx, NY

Patrick Glynn revisits utopia during a particularly eupeptic mood and who can blame him? He fought the good fight when it was hard. Lots of the central evils he—and we—faced not long ago have disappeared with the Cold War and there would be something wrong with us if we did not feel some relief.

But, politics aside for the moment, he seems on the verge of identifying good political regimes with the beatific vision. Earth is not heaven, and even as we are marvelling at what seems to be the absence of political, moral, or emotional conflict, the tide is always either on the way out or the way in. When Pascal said that the whole tragedy of man stems from his inability to sit alone, quiet in a room, he wasn't lamenting our general inaptitude as a race for the Trappists. History cannot end unless we liquidate the human heart.

I find Glenn Tinder's Augustinianism-cum-limited-progress more congenial, but perhaps we should not forget another dimension of this subject.

Alongside the progressive/utopian and anti-utopian traditions lies another, both biblical and civic humanist, about human nature. Psalm 49:19-20 warns us (in the trenchant version of the Jerusalem Bible): "Man in his prosperity forfeits intelligence: he is one with the cattle doomed to slaughter." Similarly, figures as different as Polybius, Machiavelli, and Gibbon (along with many other not wholly foolish historians) have thought we were condemned to an endless, three-fold cycle: virtue in action leading to order and prosperity, corruption as virtue grows soft amid luxuries, and, finally, a new development of virtue in confrontation with hardship. The civic humanists, more than the authors of the Psalms, seem to think the cycle of rise and fall is a virtual historical law. Nothing about human nature is absolutely determined, and the humanists need not be taken as inspired oracles. But it is at least unwise to ignore converging wisdom from such sacred and profane sources.

The psalmists and the civic humanists never studied social science at a modern university, so they probably would agree with Glenn Tinder that there is no *material* reason today why high culture and popular culture cannot be the same. What has happened to "culture"—that much-vexed term—in advanced societies is still too close to us to be accurately analyzed. But one thing is clear: popular culture was "higher" fifty years ago, for all its material impoverishment. Frank Sinatra was hip and elegant; Pearl Jam is slick and slithery. This is more than a matter of style or aesthetics. Some civilizational shock wave has spread through all modern societies. . . .

Thanks to social innovations, we now have universal education, counseling, job placement, therapy, extension courses, and even Public Television. But will the humane achievements Glynn notes survive the decay of the humanities? If some evils like slavery and limits on the size of manageable democracies have been overcome by modern technology and political discoveries, others have been introduced. It remains to be seen whether technology and wealth, for example, can survive the breakdown of family, the covert violence of abortion, the growing illegitimacy that seem to have invaded every developed country.

Progress in any field is a Good Thing, especially if we can tell whether we've really made progress or not.

Robert Royal
Ethics and Public Policy Center
Washington, D.C.

Patrick Glynn states that "the egotistical values of the earthly city are yielding to the agape-based values of the heavenly city." He wonders whether any "would deny that our institutions and political assumptions are kinder and more humane today than they were a century ago, let alone three centuries ago."

How does he explain the reappearance of old brutalities in this kinder and gentler world he sees emerging? Hippocrates recognized the wrong of abortion and physician-assisted suicide when he formulated the physician's oath a few hundred years before the birth of Christ. Abortion and suicide were abolished by law in Christian countries by the end of the Middle Ages. It was only in 1973 that the current American holocaust—1.5 million of our most vulnerable citizens destroyed each year by abortion, 98 percent because they are inconvenient or unwanted—became legal. It was in 1993 that the ban on federal funding for the harvesting of fetal tissue for transplantation and research was removed. It was only last year that one of our states voted to allow physician-assisted suicide. Also just this past year, the National Institutes of Health recommended federal funding for the creation of and experimentation upon human embryos.

Did Mr. Glynn simply overlook this new disrespect for human life or have these developments been too easily subsumed under his statement that we are "a long way from realizing the kingdom of heaven on earth"? This tendency not to see what is most barbaric and uncivilized about ourselves seems to me a prime reason we must be cautious about clinging to notions of generalized spiritual progress.

Carrie M. Griffith
Raleigh, NC

The Good Life?

In his "A Dutch Master and the Good Life" (March), Philip Bess weaves a splendid tapestry of cities, communities, morality, natural law, nature, and architecture. Every tapestry has an edge, every tapestry a tone. The article's tone is "genuinely modest," as Mr. Bess avers, suggesting that architects and religious leaders hunker down together to see whether religious communities could once against be instrumental in the creation of towns and cities.

While lauding this idea and

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applauding the tapestry, I think the tone may be too modest by half. It is too modest precisely because the tapestry is cut short, if you will, or perhaps left with a gaping hole, giving Mr. Bess's essay a "holiness" that abets the status quo. Relying on intuitions he probably shares with most of his readers, Mr. Bess states that the "juxtaposition" of Eden and Jerusalem is a proper, rational, and moral objective of human communities, while their "conflation" in the American suburban ideal "is not irrational in desire or immoral in intent, but rather a false and unrealizable promise because its very 'success' makes impossible, both physically and socially, the good life that it promises."

I find myself in agreement with Mr. Bess's perspectives but disappointed that he does not elaborate on why the American suburban ideal is evil. What does "conflation" amount to and, more importantly, why has the American city taken the sprawling shape that it has? Why is the American suburb a beast devouring the good life?

I would suggest that Mr. Bess needs to give more thought to the American political economy of public roadways. The extensive subsidies provided American roadway users fuel the development of an urban landscape that is, indeed, socially and physically dysfunctional but that makes producers and users of automobiles very happy, indeed. The existence of a system of motoring subsidies is largely ignored by American society and hotly denied when infrequently discussed. (A few years ago a World Resources Institute report suggested the subsidy to American motoring amounted to $300 billion per year, a suggestion that has not entered American political discourse.) . . .

Timothy R. Jorgenson
Milwaukee, WI

Philip Bess replies:

Mr. Jorgenson's questions touch upon important issues pertaining to cars, suburbs, and the prospects for a revived traditional urbanism in a free and democratic society. Post-World War II prosperity—nothing to sneer at—and the automobile have made suburbia *the* definition of an achievable good life for tens of millions of Americans. In that achievement, however, the automobile, which made the postwar suburb possible, has become its sine qua non—even as it has ironically caused both the consumption of the landscape that was an original object of desire and the creation of traffic congestion equal to any city's but without the city's redeeming pedestrian qualities.

The result has been an ongoing transformation of the physical environment: away from crowded cities containing a mix of pedestrian-proximate uses and relieved by open space (both *in* the city as parks and public gardens; and *beyond* the city as open landscape), toward today's unhappy conflation of city and landscape that has resulted in the condition commonly known as "sprawl."

I therefore do indeed regard the current suburban condition—and the fact that the making of it has become a cultural habit, of which highway subsidies are a symptom—as both environmentally and culturally unfortunate. Nevertheless, I am reluctant to call suburbia (or suburbanites) unambiguously evil, because I see suburbia's (and our larger community's) problems as an unintended consequence of a legitimate desire and a genuine good: the freedom of mobility originally promised by the automobile. The good news is that if I am correct, a renewal of the physical patterns of traditional urban neighborhood and small town living would not only restore an effective pedestrian mobility now denied to suburbanites too young, too old, too poor, or too infirm to drive, but well might better fulfill the automobile's original promise for those who do drive.

Ugly Americans

Many thanks for George Weigel's article about the Cairo population conference ("What Really Happened at Cairo," February). All that happened while I was in transit between Uganda, where I had been living for two years, and the U.S.

Everyone should live abroad for a while; it forces one to realize just how aberrant American culture has become, and how ugly our determination to export it to the rest of the world is. This recognition crept up on me in odd places, like a school fair.

Every year in what we call "spring" in North America (southern Uganda is 75 degrees and sunny year round) the International School in Kampala has a fair. My first year there I took my housekeeper's five children to the fair, and after I parked my car two women from the "official" American community, that is, diplomats, pounced on me.

"Whose children are those?" asked one.

"My housekeeper's."

"Good heavens! I hope you've had a talk with her about birth control!" declared the other.

Typical American response. In fact, I had not had a talk with Madina about birth control, because she is a grown woman with considerable intelligence and self-respect, and I didn't think it was any of my business. Many of the expatriate women thought it was their job to westernize their female domestics—getting them to use birth control and write wills and so on—good things, certainly, if done right. But I was determined not to impose my ideas on African friends and colleagues. For this I was often scolded—by Americans. I refused to use my connections to the Church of Uganda (Anglican) to pester them about participating in condom distribution to deal with AIDS. I lectured my students at Makerere University on abstinence and monogamy (Uganda has a tradition of polygamy). The government-sponsored newspaper published letters from my husband and me explaining Christian sexual morality. And my housekeeper, when we did talk about sex, didn't need to know about birth control; she wanted to know how to say "no."

I came to realize in my two years in Uganda what African women really want: to be empowered with a sense of moral agency, to be able to refuse

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sex and have their cultures honor them for it. What the population gang offers them is a continuation of their subservience, with condoms. And maybe abortion. What a choice.

(The Rev.) Bonnie Shullenberger
Ossining, NY

A Prescription Without Promise

In "The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind" (March), the commentators largely join author Mark Noll in ratifying a presciption that has no promise. Their argument is that evangelicals have "abandoned the universities, the arts, and other realms of high culture," and prescribes that they "confront the whole spectrum of modern learning, including economics and political science, literary criticism and imaginative writing, historical inquiry and philosophical studies, linguistics and the history of science, social theory and the arts."

With the exception of economics, which remains curiously modernist, all of these fields are entrenched bastions of postmodernism. One fails to see what advantage, or incentive, there is for the premodern orthodox, including evangelicals, to join in the intellectual "playfulness" engaged in in these scholarly "sandboxes." To what purpose? To develop "counter-deconstruction"? To formulate "re-privileging"? . . .

Tom Czerwinski
Odenton, MD

Offensive Particularity

I am neither a Muslim, Buddhist, Confucianist, "Californicating New Ager," or ACLUist, all of whom you listed as imagined opponents of a presidential proclamation bearing the phrase "In the year of Our Lord" (While We're At It [February]). I am, however, a Jew, and I'm glad the phrase is gone.

It's one thing to oppose the "secularization of the public square" (I, for one, welcome the hiring of a lone Senate chaplain, assuming he or she will point Senators and staffers in need of spiritual guidance to the appropriate clergy or counselor, as the case may be). But I am offended by, yes, the "particularity" of "In the year of Our Lord." Let's face it: you and I know which lord we're talking about, and it's not some all-encompassing Creator whose covenant we can all sign on to. The phrase has a clear meaning: "in a year as reckoned from the birth of Jesus," according to the *New Shorter Oxford Dictionary*.

My people spent the last 1,995 years resisting those who would have us accept Jesus as "Our Lord," and we paid a price. That we, like much of the rest of the world, eventually accepted the Gregorian calendar (at least in our secular transactions) was a bow toward expediency. I don't need my government rubbing my nose in it.

Andrew Silow-Carroll
Moment
Washington D.C.

Sacrilege?

In connection with your recent item about Brigham Young University's non-showing of *Schindler's List* (While We're At It [February]), once in awhile a stray news item comes along filled with such stupidity that I find it almost impossible to comprehend. That happened when I read of the decision by BYU officials to scuttle an on-campus screening of the film unless the filmmaker snip out "the starkness, the nudity, the violence." Apparently, they had a Saturday morning version of the Holocaust in mind. Not surprisingly, Steven Spielberg said no.

Not to worry. *Schindler's List* has had a successful run in Provo and throughout Utah, and any BYU student who wanted to see the film intact could have done so at a local cineplex. So censorship is not the issue here. The supremely bad judgment of the caretakers of twenty-five thousand adult college students is the issue, and though understandably BYU would like to put this matter to rest, I cannot allow that without a parting shot. . . .

That any university, which, as the term implies, should open up the universe to its students, would react so close-mindedly, is wrong. That a religious university, ostensibly founded on abiding moral principles, would do so is unconscionable. Even the 700 Club, Pat Robertson's ultraconservative national religious program, which as a matter of policy refuses to endorse R-rated films, pronounced the release of *Schindler's List* a seminal moment in film history and urged its adherents to see it, so strong is its commentary on good and evil (remember, the film venerates a Christian savior of Jews). . . .

No matter what anyone says, no matter how much ranting and raving from outsiders, the Mormon Church will evolve at its own pace. Even so, I would encourage Church leaders to take a long hard look at their actions regarding Schindlergate, and perhaps indulge in a little quiet reflection. Out of the chaos of life, we all crave guidance, direction, and purpose. Religions are in the business of teaching people how to live. Culture too can provide a vital adjunct, a film like *Schindler's List* being a prime example. It is nothing short of sacrilege to order tomorrow's leaders to turn away from it.

So, to the leadership of BYU, I offer this simple recommendation: waive your abstention from caffeine just this once, and consider an intravenous coffee drip. It's time to wake up.

Michael Levine
Los Angeles, CA

With Friends Like This . . .

Concerning Richard John Neuhaus' feisty, if occasionally good-natured, attack on my book *The Human Body Shop* ("Capitalism and the Kindness that Kills," The Public Square, January), I feel some corrections are in order. At the outset Father Neuhaus refers to a purported "howler" in my book. When commenting on the symbolic role of blood in many religious traditions, I refer to Christ's blood being transformed into sacramental drink as a central aspect of the Christian tradition. A strange claim of "reverse transubstantiation," suggests Neuhaus. Is Christ guilty of the same "howler" when He proclaims (John 6:55), "For my flesh is food

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indeed, and my blood is drink indeed"? If that be reverse transubstantiation, so be it.

Next, Father Neuhaus takes me to task for urging "a moratorium on the use of induced abortion fetuses for transplantation and research until the profound ethical and legal problems are fully discussed and resolved." Neuhaus would prefer an outright ban. So would I. However, in the book I recommended a moratorium because, at the time of my writing the book, accomplishing this biopolicy would have required merely an addition to, and extension of, the Reagan-Bush moratorium on federally funded fetal tissue research. As such, it was and remains the legislation with the most realistic chance of keeping the fetal tissue industry at bay. . . .

Neuhaus continues by implicitly accusing me of not opposing the creation of genetically engineered "humanoids." This is also mistaken. In the book I recommend a ban on the germline alteration of human beings and a complete ban on the cloning of human beings. As for genetically engineered animals—animals engineered to contain a gene from another species, including the putting of human genes into animals—these transgenic animals are in no sense "humanoids." Regardless, I also strongly oppose the creation of transgenic animals and recommend a complete ban on patenting such animals. I also recommend a moratorium on this animal research (much of it federally funded) pending a full public debate of its ethical and environmental consequences.

Finally I am equated with "vulgar Marxists" and "Eco-freaks" because I attack a market system gone out of control, one that has allowed the sale of blood, organs, fetuses, sperm, and human ova, the renting of the wombs of surrogate mothers, the patenting of human cells, genes, and genetically engineered animals, and a new industry in eugenic abortions. Even a superficial reading of my book, however, makes it clear that I criticize the market system's invasion of the human body not as a Marxist but as a defender of the Judeo-Christian, sacred view of the body. The concluding line of my book reads, "We must finally understand that the human body shop injures not only individual victims, but the very image of the sacred." Vulgar Marxism? Hardly.

One wonders why instead of attacking allies such as myself who are fighting and litigating against the human body shop and the new eugenics, Neuhaus does not save his venom for his fellow neoconservatives in Congress and in state legislatures—vulgar pro-market advocates who vote for surrogate motherhood, fetal research, and animal patenting and who approve funding for the many terrible experiments described in my book. Where, for example, is Neuhaus' editorial attacking neoconservative judges such as Richard Posner who openly advocate the sale of babies? . . .

Andrew Kimbrell
Arlington, VA

Richard John Neuhaus replies:

After two editions of his book and after having it publicly called to his attention, it seems Mr. Kimbrell has still not checked out the howler in question. What he wrote in the book is not what he writes in his letter. At the risk of embarrassing him further, this is what he wrote in *The Human Body Shop*: "Blood also plays a central role in the Christian sacramental traditions, where it is transformed into wine and consumed as the essence of life, the very presence of 'the living God.'" That does sound very much like "reverse transubstantiation." As for fetal transplantation and related experimentation, I believe a ban is politically feasible and morally imperative. I do not implicitly accuse Mr. Kimbrell of not opposing the creation of genetically engineered "humanoids." Why he infers such an accusation is beyond me. Readers may consult either the book or the quotations in my commentary to judge whether Mr. Kimbrell attacks the market economy in a manner that is aptly described as "vulgar Marxism." Finally, I don't know who the "neoconservatives" are that Mr. Kimbrell has in mind, but, to judge by his description, they must be an awful bunch and quite unlike the neoconservatives I know. Since Judge Richard Posner's ideas could hardly be further removed from my own, it never occurred to me that there might be any reason to publicly dissociate myself from him or them. Anyway, life is short and space is limited and there are so many people needing to be attacked. Judge Posner will just have to wait his turn. Finally finally, I do recognize that Andrew Kimbrell is an ally in opposing the human body shop and the new eugenics. That is what I said in my commentary.

Correction:

"Babies and Body Parts" by Paul C. Fox (December 1994) incorrectly attributed to the American Civil Liberties Union a statement from the family's legal brief asking that an anencephalic child be declared legally dead. We regret the error.

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This Time

I Heart New York

James Nuechterlein

When the Editor-in-Chief of this journal invited me to come East to work with him and his colleagues some six and a half years ago, it was in almost every way an offer I could not refuse. It meant doing work I wanted to do in the company of people I wanted to work with. I had not previously thought of leaving academic life, but I realized immediately that I was presented with a critical—and very enticing—vocational opportunity.

Except for one thing. It would mean leaving the small Midwestern community I loved in order to live (and here my stomach muscles tightened) in New York City. Cities were not strangers to me. I had grown up mainly in Detroit—and disliked it so thoroughly I determined never to live in a big city again. I had visited New York a number of times over the years—and, though often exhilarated by the experience, had always been relieved and eager to leave. A (mostly) nice place to visit, but . . .

In the end, the job was too attractive to pass up and so, swallowing my fear and loathing, I headed warily for Manhattan.

The first few years were so consumed by learning the job and by adjusting to unforeseen events related to it (you'll have to wait for my memoirs) that living in New York drifted into the background. I didn't much care for the city—on bad days I hated it—but I endured it. Yet something strange was happening, and it came to awareness some two and a half years after I'd got here. I was coming out of a lunch meeting in midtown Manhattan, and I looked up and around and simultaneously recognized two things: one, I no longer felt like a tourist, and, two, I liked the place.

"Like," of course, is an improbable word for New York. People love New York, they hate it (often at the same time), but to say they like it is as incongruous as to say they find it gracious. There is, in fact, a great deal not to like.

It is incessantly noisy, unspeakably dirty. (New Yorkers actually work heroically at keeping the city clean, but, as with so much else in the city, they find themselves overwhelmed.) The fundamental fact of there being too many people for the space available breeds habits of impersonality, isolation, and incipient aggression that war with instincts to fellow-feeling. If you ride the subway—and more people than make up the population of Chicago do so every day—you are subjected, at least on the most-crowded lines, to a degradation ceremony that would do the Marines proud. Emerge from the subway and you are engulfed in a sea of panhandlers, street people, and crazies of every sort. If New Yorkers typically affect the demeanor of people who have seen it all, it is because they have.

And then there's the expense. When Tom Wolfe in *Bonfire of the Vanities* depicted the wealthy neighborhoods of Manhattan as besieged fortresses of privilege threatened by Third World surroundings he exaggerated, but not by all that much. There is a middle class in Manhattan; it simply begins at an income tens of thousands of dollars beyond that elsewhere. Prior to moving to the city, I asked a prominent New York editor what salary I should negotiate for. "What are you making now?" he asked. When I told him my modest but not embarrassing Midwestern salary, he threw up his hands. "That's poverty level here," he said. Unlike Tom Wolfe, he did not exaggerate.

Given all this, why the (unexpected) affection for New York? Begin at the simplest level: it's not always as dreadful as advertised. Take crime, for example. For reasons I do not fully understand, the city is commonly perceived as a place where citizens live in constant fear for their lives and property. But it's simply not true. American cities are all, to some extent, unsafe places. But New York is not prominent among them. Its crime rates rank well down in comparative terms. More than that, the rates are dropping. A few weeks ago a cab driver (founts of all knowledge concerning the city) told me he had never felt safer in fifteen years of driving here. That same night on the local news I learned that official crime rates were lower than they had been in two decades. For whatever it's worth—and at the risk of tempting fate—I can testify that in my half-dozen years here I have never felt in physical danger.

But one loves New York (all right, I said it) not simply because it's not as awful as its worst critics portray it. Much of that involves all the clichés that surround life in the city: its infinite variety, its boundless energy, its unrivaled opportunities, its magnificent urban beauty (it still takes my breath away to cross the Queensboro bridge at night into midtown Manhattan). That's all been remarked on so often that the temptation to take it for granted is overwhelming, but the temptation ought to be resisted.

And there's more. New York is strong where it is often thought to be weak: its sense of community. Community talk is very big these days, and it's often just that—talk. One hears a lot about the virtues of "thick community," and one wonders if those who extol it have in fact ever experienced it. Our excessively individualistic society finds it easy to romanticize its opposite: living for a time in circumstances where private lives are regularly the subject of communal discussion—not to mention

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resolution—might lead theoretical communitarians to reconsider their enthusiasm.

I loved the small town in upstate New York I lived in for a few years as a child; I'm sure I would go mad there—both out of limited opportunity and out of desire for privacy—as an adult. And I recall even as a child moments of intense shame occasioned when embarrassing family matters became the subject of town gossip. Communities *know* you: that is why we at once yearn for them and retreat from them in dread.

The great thing about New York is that it offers as much opportunity for community as one desires. Its variety allows for the most exotic forms of community imaginable: if you require fellowship with other cross-dressing Latvian cribbage players, New York can provide it for you. My own communal needs are considerably more pedestrian, but I can report that, having lived in communities of seven thousand, twenty-five thousand, sixty thousand, 150 thousand, 1.5 million, and, now, 7.3 million, I have nowhere more fully felt a sense of community—nowhere found myself so securely part of a band of brothers—as in cold, impersonal Manhattan. New York is not a home—it is far too large for that—but its very size and variety allow it to provide homes within it for a staggering range of home-seekers. Beyond that, it provides a backdrop so expansively grand and multifarious as to remind bands of brothers of the larger worlds, and the wider visions, that exist beyond them.

Dr. Johnson famously remarked that "when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life." He then added, "For there is in London all that life can afford." I assume that was true of Johnson's London. I know it's true of my New York. FT

The Fountain at Hope Lodge

Wacamaw Potteries may have a hundred
fountains like the one in the patio garden
at the hostel—no river allegories or heraldic
bears or tritons, no Respighi, no coins
in the shallows of the three stone tiers,
for given choice, who would return?
All of us imagine oncologists pronouncing
transubstantiating words: *cured,*
complete clinical remission, clean.

Another kind of garden is the cancer
center, stranger than Rappacini's, with cell
changing drugs, radiation, genes,
and gardeners who know my gnarls and burns
and baldness as well as God or any lover.

Those gardeners and the fountain's donor buy
me more than here and now mellifluent tongues
of water parting, cascading to the brim of noon
leaves winking in the breeze.
I am immersed
in summer glossolalia—remembered flights
of shrieking children through the lawn sprinkler's
icy gauntlet: simple mercies
I keep still in thankful mind.

Noreen Hayes

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Opinion

The Big Think

J. Bottum

Part of the problem with the awful kind of augury performed by Alvin Toffler and the futurists is that it is heretical to any religion outside L. Ron Hubbard's Church of Scientology, and part of the problem is that it is aesthetically vulgar, but most of the problem is that it is all so silly it feels a little small-minded to notice that it is heretical and vulgar. Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?

And yet—well, and yet, there is a seductive consistency to Toffler's prognostications, and he surely seems to know a lot about a lot of different kinds of things, and after all he *might* be right about the shape of things to come. And once we start to think this way—as Speaker Newt Gingrich apparently has—we are caught, for something lives in all of us that wants to shake loose from our petty little thoughts, that wants to move around and think big thoughts, that wants to get up and do the Big Think in just the way that Toffler and his fellow prophets of the technological future all seem able to do.

We ought to be at least initially skeptical whenever we encounter simplicity used to explain complexity, but the explanatory range of a thought is not exactly what makes the thought big. Big thinking almost always involves the prediction of specific future events, and thus not every big explanation is born from thinking big. Aristotle was not a big thinker, though Plato could be from time to time. St. Thomas Aquinas never did the Big Think, though St. Bonaventure felt the urge occasionally. Even Hegel was not prone to thinking big by predicting the specific future, though Marx was when the unbuttoned mood was on him.

Just predicting the future, however, is not enough to constitute a Big Think. St. John of Patmos was not a big thinker and neither was Nostradamus, but Swedenborg, Joachim of Flora, and H. G. Wells were. The key to thinking big is the determination of specific future events according to a theory; the key is the construction of a systematic morphology of time, an analogy in which the appearance of something in a known system of the past or the present *requires* the appearance of an anologue in an unknown but analogous system of the future. Big thinking is the replacement of direct causal relations with the weird and wonderful causality of analogy: if an event occurs in one system, then the parallel event *must* occur in an analogous second system—even though we see no direct cause for the event within that second system.

If no prediction of the future short of divine revelation were possible, then we could dismiss the futuristic prophecies of big thinkers as easily as we dismiss the astrological fantasies of the Psychic Friends Network on late night television. But the problem is that all social commentary, all political thought, and all moral judgment rely on the fact that the future is at least partially predictable, on the fact that we can have some knowledge of the shape of things to come. But the difference between big thinking and the kind of predictions we have to make to live our lives is not one of degree (as though technological futurism were normal scientific prediction carried just a little too far) but one of kind: big thinking scorns to link known causes to predictable effects.

Some people are better than others at discerning the future. All of us can figure out, a second before the train barrels past, whether we could have made it across the railroad tracks. But some people can judge much earlier what's coming down the tracks—when the train first rumbles into sight around the bend, when we still have time to try to make it through the crossroads. The future is partially predictable, and some people seem to have a talent for the sort of practical judgment that discerns the present links joining future events to past causes. But the big thinker scorns these little causal links of practical judgment. The big thinker is the man who doesn't need to see the long black train coming 'round the bend; he just *knows*—after careful consultation of his watch and minute calculations in the margins of his train schedule—that we can make it safe across the tracks.

Of all the thinkers of the Big Think, the biggest was Oswald Spengler—and the most self-congratulatory. "In this book," he wrote of his own *Decline of the West* (1918), "is attempted for the first time the venture of predetermining history." Spengler claimed to have found the Archimedean point for undertaking the "Copernican Revolution" of history and thus for seeing history in its "morphological" forms. The morphologist of history sees that each culture has in it elements that correspond to elements in other cultures: as the ancient Mediterranean decayed into the imperialism of Alexander the Great, so the modern West *must* shortly have its Alexander. This is not cause and effect, any more than the fact that a dog has paws causes a cat to have paws. The "form" of mammal is the same in both dogs and cats despite their differences. The morphologist of history looks not for cause and effect (the old structures of bad science), but for *Destiny*: the inescapable recreation of the stages of general Cul-

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ture in every moment of each specific culture.

We do not reach down to what is wrong with the Big Think by listing Spengler's many factual errors about the past and failed predictions about the future. The Big Think is not wrong because Spengler was a sloppy historian, a proto-Nazi, and a terrible writer, though he was all three. Spengler's Big Think is wrong because it replaces fact with method, proof with illustration, and cause with parallel. Spengler is wrong not so much because the ostensible facts he deigns to gather are often mistaken, but because he gathers his facts solely to illustrate an idea that he just *knows* from the beginning has to be true since it explains so much.

Nothing is as dated as the future, and nothing more nostalgic than the prophetic notions we held in days gone by. The smart house and the paperless office, the classless society and the withering away of the state are exhibits now closed in Tomorrowland, but to remember them is to remember how things used to be. For twenty years, in his best-selling futurist trilogy *Future Shock*, *The Third Wave*, and *Powershift*, Alvin Toffler has been predicting the imminence of the future. About some events he turned out to be right, about others wrong, but the most remarkable thing about his prophecies is how rapidly they, like Spengler's, came to seem old.

Perhaps this rapid aging of the thesis of the book itself proves that there was something to Toffler's 1970 *Future Shock*, which asserted that the future comes faster in these late times than it used to. Under the baleful influence of his brother Brooks, Henry Adams put a similar thesis in a 1909 essay, "The Rule of Phase Applied to History," claiming that each new age is in length only the square root of the age before—and predicting that human thinking will come "to the limit of its possibilities in the year 1921." It didn't happen that way, of course, but the prophesies of Adams, and of Spengler shortly after him, captured the sense of a world worn out that many people felt at the time. And so, too, Toffler's *Future Shock* captured the sense of unassimilated change that many people felt in the silly season of the late sixties and early seventies.

It was with *The Third Wave* in 1980, however, that Toffler found at last the Spenglerian morphology for predetermining history that made it all explain so much. Just as the first wave of agricultural technology was in its ebbing overwhelmed by the flow of industrial technology, so the ebbing wave of industry is now being overwhelmed by the wave of electronic technology. To the shrimp and seaweed tossed by combers, swirled in the backwash and drowned in the breakers, life may seem confusing. But to the big thinker standing on the beach with his schedule of ocean tides, the pattern of the waves is plain.

The pattern that he claims to see is that the struggle for power is the struggle to control knowledge. In *The Third Wave* Toffler seems to argue that the source of power has always been the control of knowledge (and thus that even first-wave feudalism and second-wave industrialism ought to be explained as knowledge control), while in his 1990 *Powershift* he seems to argue that only with the third, electronic wave of technology does knowledge control become the source of power. But either way, all the changes apparently overtaking modern civilization are best understood as struggles to control the flood of information cast upon us by electronic technology.

There is an odd sort of optimistic pessimism about all big thinkers, for the future is determined and there is nothing we can do about it except understand it through big thinking. Certain family planning measures "could help us ease our way into tomorrow, minimizing for millions the pain of transition," Toffler writes in *The Third Wave*. "But whether painful or not, a new family system is emerging to supplant" our old one, and we had best just stand aside before the unstoppable wave sweeps us under. Just as the anti-industrial Luddites vainly tried to hold back the second wave before they sank, so—Toffler sees in good morphological fashion—anti-technologists vainly try now to hold back the third wave. They too will sink, and the only dry person will be the big thinker on the beach who stands above the unstoppable waves.

With this pattern in place, Toffler and the futurists can explain everything. When the Communist regimes were successful in Eastern Europe, it was because they controlled knowledge. When the Communist regimes collapsed, it was because they could no longer do so. Toffler was, one supposes from his work, an anti-Communist. But his writing about communism asserts an oddly valueless necessity. Communism failed because it foolishly tried to control communication in a global economy, and not because people thought democracy was better. An anarchic sort of democracy appears simply because no government is capable any longer of imposing intelligible order on information.

The content of this information is finally unimportant—though Toffler tends to think of it as always knowledge about how to do things. The third wave has a strange, self-fulfilling quality about it, since the knowledge for which companies and governments spy upon each other is mostly knowledge about the technologies for gaining knowledge. Moral knowledge seems not to exist in this wave, and Toffler generally equates morality with social necessity. The role of the churches in the overthrow of Communist regimes he praises only because the churches offered a system for the exchange of knowledge that was outside government control, and not because the churches held any knowledge that people desired.

But the Big Think is always impersonal in exactly this way, whether in Spengler, or Adams, or Toffler,

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or any of their innumerable imitators. The predetermined future is coming willy-nilly, and only the big thinker who knows the big picture will be calm. And in Toffler's vision, since power is knowledge of the ways to gain knowledge, only big thinkers like Toffler will have power. The rest of us—raising our children, trying to tell right from wrong, living our lives as best we can, using the technology that seems helpful to us and ignoring the rest—are apparently doomed to helpless lives swirling in the backwash.

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Baby Talk

David Klinghoffer

When is a child not a child?

That sounds like the opening line of a not very funny joke, but it is the question that bothers me almost every time my fellow abortion opponents open their mouths. They claim it is "children" who die in abortions. Do they, however, *really* mean children—like the ones you see toddling in the street? Reactions to the deeds of Paul Hill and John Salvi suggest, to this observer anyway, that people in the anti-abortion movement often say things they do not and should not mean.

Following the news that a Florida judge had condemned Hill to the electric chair, the National Right to Life Committee expressed the view of most abortion foes. While mourning the deaths of "unborn children," the committee "unequivocally oppose[d]" Mr. Hill's decision to kill an abortion doctor to stop the man from going about this daily rounds. On the same day that I read the Committee's statement, I picked up the December 1994 issue of FIRST THINGS containing a symposium among conservative religious thinkers on "Killing Abortionists." Cardinal O'Connor of New York, Cardinal Mahony of Los Angeles, the Christian Coalition's Ralph Reed, and others urged against accepting Paul Hill's statement that "Whatever force is legitimate in defending a born child is legitimate in defending an unborn child." Nearly all the symposium's participants agreed that the strictures of such authorities as Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin rule out the deliberate use of deadly force to stop abortions.

It was not that the contributors disputed Mr. Hill's view that the entity in the womb is unambiguously a "child." They spoke of abortion as "a moral species of murder" perpetrated against "unborn children," "innocent human beings." Indeed, the one thing Paul Hill has in common with the mainstream anti-abortion movement is a tendency to speak about abortion in the language of genocide. One hears constantly about the slaughter of "children" in the abortion "holocaust."

Thus after John Salvi let loose his own salvo against the abortion industry, it was no surprise to find Randall Terry of Operation Rescue writing in the *New York Post* about the "slaughter [of] our young," "the murder of innocent children," "thirty-five million innocent babies [torn] from their mothers' wombs"—while simultaneously opposing armed action on the grounds of unspecified "principles of Calvin, Knox, and Cromwell concerning 'lower magistrates.'"

Though abortion opponents favor the most colorful possible speech, one may oppose abortion without it. For instance, there is the Jewish approach (which is my own). Exodus 21:22 specifies what happens when a man violently brings a woman's pregnancy to a premature end: he pays a fine, a penalty hardly comparable to that imposed by God for murder (the death penalty) or for manslaughter (internal exile). Citing this and other verses, the rabbis of the Talmud concluded that abortion, while not the murder of a child, is to be strongly rejected as an interference in the divinely guided process of human reproduction.

So, as a Jew, I always stop short at terms like "holocaust" as applied to abortion. A holocaust is the mass murder of entities that are human beings in every sense in which Cardinal O'Connor or Randall Terry is a human being. And if a holocaust were going on in the United States today, one would think the responsibility to take up arms against it would be as great as it was when an undisputed Holocaust was going on in Europe. Within that part of the anti-abortion movement whose members decry the "murder" of "innocent children," a few, such as Paul Hill and John Salvi, have acted accordingly—bombing clinics and shooting staffers. That these men used force in a wild, uncontrolled way does not mean that sane abortion foes could not come up with a more careful strategy, using the minimum level of violence necessary to accomplish their end: say, by shooting abortion doctors in the legs instead of the head, or setting fire to clinics by night.

And yet when a Catholic priest in Alabama sought to justify the use of force to prevent abortions, his archbishop denounced and suspended him. Reacting to Paul Hill, Cardinal O'Connor said, "If anyone has an urge to kill an abortionist, let him kill me instead." Some abortion opponents I know disdain even the civil disobedience of Operation Rescue. And the archbishop of Boston has gone so far as to rule out even peaceful protests on the sidewalks outside abortion clinics. These polite people insist on the adequacy of words and votes.

To be sure, they offer earnest intellectual justifications for their inaction. Some allow that they might

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in theory accept the use of force to stop the murder of "babies," but "prudential considerations" regarding the practical effectiveness of violence rule it out. Yet I have never heard a sustained discussion comparing the strategic merits of peaceful persuasion (which so far has produced meager results) with the merits of force. Among this variety of abortion foes, as soon as the words "prudential considerations" (or some equivalent) are invoked, the discussion comes to a quick, relieved halt. Others present arguments opposing force altogether, on moral grounds.

A detailed example appeared in the November 1994 issue of *Catholic World Report*, in which Professor John M. Haas cited the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas: "It is unlawful to take a man's life, except for the public authority acting for the common good." Professor Haas, who speaks of "the unborn" instead of "the children," reserves to the state the right to kill in defense of innocent life, and concludes that "two wrongs do not make a right." Alternatively, an abortion opponent may say the abortionist "kills children" but does not "murder" them, since murder implies an intent to take the life of an entity you know to be a full human being. Cardinal O'Connor asserts that, despite the mass "murder" going on, "The United States today is not Nazi Germany."

There is a gap in reasoning here. Assume that a fetus is a child. Then every five years, the United States allows the murder of more babies than the Nazis killed Jews. Yes, the authorities who guarantee the right of abortion and the doctors who carry out the surgery do not believe fetuses are human beings, but neither did the Nazis believe that Jews are human beings. In one case the government itself organized the act of genocide. In the other, the government guarantees the right of a subpopulation—abortionists—to commit genocide. So if a fetus is a child, what's the big difference?

The truth is, the distinctions offered by the intellectuals and activists I refer to have about them a distinct air of excuse-making. Imagine that fifty years ago a theologian of moral seriousness equal to that of Cardinal O'Connor found himself outside the gate of Auschwitz and holding a machine gun, given the opportunity to liberate some prisoners by shooting a couple of guards. Had you at that moment admonished him—saying "two wrongs do not make a right"—one assumes he would not have been deterred.

I know from experience that most abortion foes are people moved not by some psychosexual desire to enslave women, as pro-abortion activists frequently allege, but by a commitment to moral sentiments. If these intelligent and passionately engaged men and women believed with a whole heart that abortion is murder, if they really believed that the lives of a million actual children are at stake every year, then I have no doubt they would be organizing clandestine paramilitary units to move against abortion providers at this moment. They would *find* justification in Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin.

Thank God they are not arming for guerrilla war. Yet neither that fact, nor any admiration for their moral commitments, should excuse such sloppy language. For language has consequences. Just as you must not shout "fire" in a theater crowded with people, you must not say "murder" and "child" in a movement that includes people, however few, like John Salvi.

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Who Broke the Baby?

Jean Garton

"The distance between life and death," wrote columnist Paul Greenberg, "can be as small as a word." His comment jogged my memory as to how a single word at a particular time had fashioned my own personal journey through the doublespeak of abortion.

Some twenty years ago, when I joined an organization of abortion advocates, it was the word "right"—as in "a woman's right to choose"—that shaped my views. A few years later it was again the word "right"—as in the "the right to life"—that drew me into the pro-life movement.

As an abortion advocate, I had learned never to give humanity to what was in the womb of a pregnant woman. "Don't use the words 'child' or 'baby,'" we were told. Talk instead about "a mass of tissue" or "the product of conception."

Mass of tissue? Who isn't? Product of conception? Aren't we all? If what is aborted is *not* a living human being with a claim to legal protection then why couldn't we defend abortion with words that were less generic? It seemed to me a strange kind of truth that required deception to promulgate it.

After months of seeking such words, I found none. I realized I either had to change my mind or continue to change reality by disguising the truth.

In America today the lives of unborn children have come to depend not on scientific fact but on the use of misleading words. "Fetus" is one of those. It is a good word, a medical word, but a Latin word. Why

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has a word from a "dead" language been resurrected for use in everyday conversation? After all, we don't congratulate parents on the birth of their "neonate."

Verbal smoke screens have long been used to accustom people to accept ideas, actions, and policies they would otherwise find obnoxious. "Fetus" serves the manipulative purpose of dehumanizing those in the womb who are unwanted, while words like "unborn children" or "child before birth" call forth an emotional and relational response.

A few years ago, in a high-profile trial of an abortion doctor, a picture was shown of an unborn child the same gestational age as the one who had been aborted. The press called it a "fetus." The doctor's lawyer called it a "fetus." The jury, though, called what they saw a "premature baby."

Shakespeare understood that it is easier to kill a snake than to kill a human being. Thus in *Julius Caesar* he has Brutus set the stage for Caesar's murder by using words that would dehumanize him: "Think him as a serpent's egg . . . and kill him in the shell."

Yet women throughout the ages have always known that what they carry are children. Before ever there was a pro-life movement there were *baby* showers, not fetus showers. Pregnant women are asked by friend and stranger alike, "When is your *baby* due?" Fathers say, "I heard the *baby's* heartbeat," and mothers say, "I felt the *baby* move." Expectant parents are quick to show ultrasound pictures of their *baby* in the womb. Women who miscarry grieve the loss of a *child* not of a fetus.

Over thirty years ago Planned Parenthood pamphlets warned that "an abortion kills the life of a *baby* after it has begun." To pretend that what is in the womb is anything but a child is, as George Will once said, "a revolution against the judgment of generations."

The unborn child, of course, is not the same as the child sleeping in a crib or playing in a sandbox. Yet, if someone were to say he or she had at home an infant and an adolescent, we surely would not wonder if that person was referring to different kinds of pets or variations of plants. Infant and adolescent are terms that describe human beings at various stages of development. That is all the word "fetus" does. It tells us where a child is on the life spectrum. Is the adolescent less human than the adult? Is the infant less human then the adolescent? Is the fetus less human than the infant? They are different only in terms of development and dependence.

Columnist Joan Beck, writing in the *Chicago Tribune*, said that "Obstetricians understand better than anyone else that an unborn baby isn't a blob of tissue or a growing tumor or an unnecessary appendix. Whatever the euphemisms, they know that it is living, that it is human, that it is unique, and that abortion kills it."

Children know it, too, and they know it instinctively. Late one night, as I viewed an abortion slide, my youngest child, then a sleepy three-year old, unexpectedly entered the room. I heard his sharp intake of breath as he saw the body of a three-month old, dismembered by a D & C abortion. With great sadness in his voice he asked, "Who broke the baby?" Here was a child too young to have his sight clouded by semantic subterfuge, and, with a wisdom that often escapes the learned, he could mentally assemble the body parts and call what he saw a broken *baby*.

What, then, is this thing called abortion? If a living human child is killed by it, is abortion murder? Not now. Not since the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling. "Murder," by dictionary definition, is "the unlawful and malicious or premeditated killing of one human being by another." Abortion qualifies as premeditated in that it is contracted for and carried out at a set time and place. What abortion is *not* is unlawful, but that does not change the nature of what abortion is or does.

There are some who taunt pro-lifers by saying that if we really believe abortion kills children, if what is in the womb is really a child, then we ought to commend, not condemn, the killing of abortion providers. They don't understand that it is possible to be anti-abortion but not pro-life, that pro-lifers oppose violence whether inside or outside abortion centers, that the goading of pro-lifers to respond in kind is more of a provocation to violence than are words that speak of a child's right to be born. Pro-lifers know that violence is too weak a weapon against the evil that is abortion. They know it cannot be called murder in a legal sense but that it can be called a holocaust.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II. While historically and socially the Nazi Holocaust was a unique episode in human history, the forces that created it are alive and well today. Those forces, the coupling of dehumanizing language with technology that dispatched victims in an efficient assembly-line manner, characterized the Third Reich. If we think that kind of evil is safely frozen in the past, we ignore the unpleasant truth about human nature: that the potential for great evil exists in each of us. And the human mind is never more resourceful than when it is involved in self-justification.

The Holocaust of half a century ago is too singular to be watered down by comparisons. But so, too, is the American holocaust of over thirty-two million children who have been killed and buried beneath words that have been emptied of their meaning. The words of Scripture, though, are clear and precise when they say of a pregnant woman simply that she is "with child." That is why, after twenty-two years, the Supreme Court's decision that was touted as having "settled" the abortion issue has

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not—because those who oppose it think in terms of reverence rather than rights.

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After Darwin

John J. Reilly

The ice is beginning to crack in another section of the cold, hard surface of modernity. The part of the frozen lake that is breaking up this time is Darwinism, or at least Darwinism as a worldview with implications for culture and social policy. And as with the breaking up of Marxism and Freudianism, we may not like what bubbles to the surface when all the ice finally melts.

The death of Darwinism, it now seems clear, will be chaos theory (or "complexity theory," as the researchers in the young science of emergent order seem to prefer). The problem with Darwinism, as honest Darwinists have always admitted, is that it has nothing to say about how new features of living things arise or how new instinctual behaviors originate. It has a great deal to say about how natural selection can preserve and refine these things once they appear, of course. It inspired a search in the fossil record for the lineages of living creatures that has given our natural science a unique historical depth. Darwinism is not wrong; it just is not the final answer to the question of how living things originate. We have been looking in the wrong place for that answer—which must be not so much a matter of genes as of the order that arises spontaneously from simpler units (particularly the geometries of complex molecules).

Even children often notice that the paw and foreleg of a dog are like a strangely distorted human hand, with the thumb appearing as a useless claw partway up the foreleg. The skeletons of all vertebrates, in fact, have long been known to be variations on a few basic structural themes. Anatomical analogies show up among all classes of living things. These analogies were the basis in the eighteenth century for the comprehensive classification of species drawn up by Carolus Linnaeus. And these variations on common anatomical themes occur not only between species. Within individual organisms, sophisticated features grow from the variation of more primitive ones, as illustrated by Goethe's still persuasive derivation of all the major parts of a plant from the basic form of the leaf.

A description of nature like this invites the search for common mechanisms in living things to generate the archetypical forms. If biology had maintained this perspective into the next century, however, the search might not have produced fruitful results, since the physics of the time was unable to address the question of the spontaneous generation of order. In any event, this way of looking at biology was reduced to a minor theme of scientific thought for several generations as more accessible avenues of research appeared.

In the nineteenth century, as Michel Foucault noted in *The Order of Things*, the structural diagrams of eighteenth-century biology became timelines, descriptions of the lineages of living things. This, of course, was only one of several areas in which knowledge was being given a genealogical twist. Much the same was happening in philology, as the comparative description of Indo-European languages became the description of the descent of language families. In the English-speaking world, however, the pervasive genealogical cast of modern Western thought was expressed primarily through the new, radically evolutionary biology that Darwin introduced. Darwinism became the governing mode of thought among biologists not because they felt it provided a foundation for early industrial capitalism or for some other ulterior motive, but because it produced results. It did not produce quite the results earlier scientists would have liked to see, of course. It led biologists to ask historical questions, to enquire "how" rather than "why" the living world came to be as it is, and evolutionary biology became a science of narratives rather than general principles. But the results Darwinism did produce were so important that only today do we perhaps see how the Darwinian perspective could ever be exhausted.

The problem is that the genes, the medium of natural selection, do not exhaust heredity. The DNA in the nucleus of a cell cannot even reproduce itself. It requires the special environment provided by the complex anatomy of the cell to do so. When a cell divides, many other bodies have to reproduce themselves besides the nucleus. What DNA does provide is information for the manufacture of proteins. What the proteins then do in turn, however, is a matter of structural chemistry. The British biologist Brian Goodwin, in his 1994 book *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots*, shows just how much autonomy proteins have in bending and forming themselves into the stuff of living things. There are unicellular organisms that will partially regenerate their quite complicated surfaces even if the nucleus is removed, guided by chemical geometries even more complicated than those that give us snowflakes and mineral crystals. You would never guess from looking at the formulae of these chemicals that they can form branches and other structures, quite without micro-

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management from the nucleus. Researchers in complexity theory were not the first to notice that order can arise spontaneously. Thanks to some new mathematics and the number-crunching abilities of computers, however, we now have some understanding of how this is possible.

The unsettling thing about chaos theory is its casual dismissal of material reductionism. The stuff of which something is made does not necessarily determine its behavior. Rather, the behavior of material is guided by certain "shapes" that turn up throughout nature, in the living and the nonliving. It has long been known, for instance, that plants and animals often subtly incorporate familiar number sequences into their anatomies, such as those plants whose leaves are arranged around their stems in accordance with the dictates of the Golden Section, or with the Fibonacci series. Today we can see in detail how even simple, nonliving materials can also assume these forms. The mathematics that governs the "periodic" patterns formed by colonies of slime molds turns out to be the same mathematics that describes the function (and malfunction) of the heart. Like other complex systems, life manifests "emergent" properties, abilities of which there is no hint in the material that makes them up. Life's special property, however, is to be able to regenerate itself, and by extension to reproduce itself. Goodwin argues that this self-sustaining ability is neither a miracle nor an accident, but a probable state into which the appropriate materials will fall, just as water running down a drain will assume the shape of a whirlpool.

The random mutation of genes explains neither life's origin nor the complex structures of living things. Random accident simply will not provide the instructions needed to build an amoeba, much less an eye. If what the complexity theorists say is true, however, then the basic features of life are often-repeated variations on "accidents waiting to happen." The formation of the eye, for instance, seems to be a recapitulation on a smaller scale of the folding and differentiation process that produces the whole nervous system. The fact that the formation of eyes—from the eyes of flies to the eyes of eagles—may be triggered by a genetic "switch" common to all forms of seeing life illustrates how a single piece of genetic information can produce widely different anatomical structures. Genes are important, of course. They define the field (called the "morphospace") where the possible forms of an organism are found. The field is not flat, however. Irregularities do not arise from genes, but from general formal principles. For a normal developing organism, there are "potholes" in morphospace into which they fall. For an evolutionary line of organisms, morphospace is sloped in a way that guides evolution in some directions but not in others. Thus, for instance, there are no vertebrates with six limbs, useful though that arrangement might seem to be. Not just anything can happen in biology, time and natural selection notwithstanding.

Today's Neo-Darwinists are aware of these things, and they are not unduly upset by them. Stephen Jay Gould, for instance, has noted that some biological features seem to be easier to evolve than others. He has made the point a part of his deconstruction of meaning in evolution. Not only does evolution have no particular direction, he says, but organisms do not even make the kind of sense they would if they were perfectly adapted to their environments. Their basic structures are even more arbitrary than we thought, for they seem to be guided in large part by nothing more than formal accidents. Natural selection, Gould says, simply makes organisms that are good enough to survive. It does not make them perfect.

While this argument has some merit, it can only deliver its intended frisson of existential emptiness if the easy-to-evolve forms are both completely arbitrary and very numerous. Gould thought he had evidence for these propositions from the analysis of the Burgess Shale fossils from British Columbia, which seemed to show that the biological world of half a billion years ago was inhabited by weird organisms that were not, for the most part, ancestral to the living things we see today. This biological dispensation was ended by one of the great, sudden die-offs to which our planet is subject. The survivors survived merely because they were lucky, not because they were in any way superior.

This thesis, argued with great persuasiveness in Gould's 1989 book *Wonderful Life*, was badly punctured by fossil finds made in China from roughly the same period. The Burgess Shale fossils had suffered a history that left them rather jumbled, so Gould was relying on careful but problematical efforts to piece them back together. The Chinese fossils were much better preserved. They showed that the strange monsters so imaginatively reconstructed from the British Columbian rocks were in fact mostly more primitive but ancestral forms of creatures with which we are familiar. This suggests that evolution had less choice about following the course it did than the Neo-Darwinian synthesis would lead us to believe.

None of this implies a radical break with biology as we know it. It does suggest something of a return to the more purely structural biology of the eighteenth century. The difference is that we will be able to go a long way toward describing just how anatomical forms arise in a given organism, rather than satisfying ourselves with an account of the organism's lineage. Parallel evolution, the fact that very similar creatures can arise from quite different evolutionary histories, is likely to attract more attention now that we have a theory for it. Actually, a science of form suggests a return to a kind of biology even older than Linnaeus. *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots* does not even mention Aristotle in

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the index, but obviously complexity theory is well on the way to restating something like the notion of formal cause. The difference, of course, is that while Aristotle was very interested in the actual stuff in which forms were potentially present, complexity theory emphasizes the independence of forms from the materials they shape.

There was a strong Platonic streak in the biology of two centuries ago. The "archetypical" forms that supposedly defined the natural world were often incorporated into the "argument from design" for the existence of God. The forms described by complexity are far more abstract than anything conceived in the eighteenth century, however. An argument from design that attempted to make use of them would have to argue not from the design of actual living things but from that of the mathematical objects that govern their development.

If in fact the approach to evolution suggested by complexity theory is as important as its proponents say, one of the unforeseen side-effects is likely to be a noticeable demotion of the ontological status of the gene. Goodwin himself does not seem to appreciate this, since he ends his book with a tirade that, among other things, castigates genetic engineering as an impudent meddling with the forces of nature. But the whole point of complexity in biology is that genes just define the morphospace for other substances to do their work. They are not the "essence" of life. If life has an essence, it lies in the immaterial forms that govern its development. Furthermore, complexity suggests that genetic engineering may have surprisingly narrow limits. What the creature will be like cannot be computed from the DNA in the nucleus of a germ cell. This follows from the basic idea of emergent behavior: the activity of a complex system cannot be computed from the composition of its parts.

Genetics is a wonderful science, of course. We can alter the genetic makeup of a cell so that it produces useful substances, such as insulin, and we can spot mistakes in the genes of individuals. What we cannot do, however, is produce a super-race, or indeed any kind of radically new creature. Novelty in biology means a change not just in the genes, but in the whole organism. It is not in our power to create new archetypes to inform artificial creatures. Such archetypes might be waiting in morphospace for us to stumble on them in the course of doing something else, but that is hardly "engineering."

Something else we may soon be able to forget about is sociobiology, at least in its evolutionist incarnation. Emergent behavior belongs as much to societies of living things as to the life of individual organisms. It is emergent behavior that permits insect colonies, each individual member of which is almost completely stupid, to act in a wonderfully coordinated fashion. (As Goodwin demonstrates, it is actually simpler to show the mathematical basis of social behavior than of physical morphogenesis, since whole organisms are much easier to observe than molecules.) Attempts to use evolution to explain why people act the way they do tend to take much the same form as evolutionary explanations of anatomy. If you believe writers like Robert Wright (author of *The Moral Animal*), it is all perfectly simple. Natural selection ensures that those genes that support life-sustaining behavior will be passed on to future generations, just as it ensures that genes associated with useful physical traits will be passed on. In Wright's scheme of things, of course, communitarian and altruistic behavior are survival-enhancing, rather than the highly competitive and aggressive behavior emphasized by earlier Darwinists. And yet, while it is possible to show by studying primates why a particular behavior may be good for human genes, the only real evidence that a given human behavior may be life-sustaining is that some living people act that way today. In other words, their lineages survived because their lineages survived—which is true enough as far as it goes, but not really very helpful. Certainly it gets us not a millimeter nearer to understanding where these life-sustaining behaviors came from in the first place. Natural selection is not false, of course: an unfortunate inherited disposition, such as an irresistible impulse to jump off high places, is going to diminish the survival prospects of any family line. Natural selection refines behavioral repertoires that have other origins. It does not explain them.

Yet while the theory of natural selection does not do everything we might wish, at least it does not do too much. Sociobiology is often criticized for suggesting that we are slaves to our genetic inheritances, to which sociobiologists reply that our genes compel us to do almost nothing, but simply give certain predispositions. An attempt to explain human behavior using complexity would actually be much more deterministic. Complexity would turn sociobiologists from looking for etiological myths in the anthropological literature and set them to trying to define archetypes of behavior. One can imagine a whole new sociology that is interested not in fundamental causes, but in the perception of ideal states, like discerning the hexagrams of the "I Ching" in daily life. Doubtless these states will be defined empirically, using the sort of computer models that have proven so helpful in explaining how all the ants in a nest can manage to start and stop in a synchronous rhythm. Post-Darwinian sociobiology, too, will be something best taken with a grain of salt.

Goodwin makes the point that Darwin's model of evolution closely parallels what he, and others, imagine is the Christian model of history. Both deal with imperfect creatures slowly redeeming their natures as they struggle forward in time. Goodwin hopes that evolution as seen from the perspective of

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complexity will have an appeal beyond the Christian West. He sees it as an expression of the "original blessing" theology of Matthew Fox. The whole natural world participates in the same fundamental forms, and so trees should have rights like those of human beings, and people should be nice to each other and establish a cooperative, community-based economy. The last two chapters of his book are devoted to these ideas, but they are, I think, something of a non sequitur. Complexity theory is simply not a metaphysics of universal harmony. The more likely effect on popular culture of this view of evolution would not be communitarian, but apocalyptic.

There is not much difference between a Hegelian synthesis and the radically unpredictable emergent behavior of a complex system. The vitalist biologists of the first half of the twentieth century were criticized, doubtless correctly, for appealing to mysterious, unmeasurable organic forces. Complexity theory requires no new physical forces, but its emphasis on unpredictable leaps in nature is strongly reminiscent of Henri Bergson. It invites the creation of philosophies like dialectical materialism, but minus the material. Darwinism went well with a view of history characterized by slow human progress. The new view of evolution, on the other hand, suggests the possibility of sudden cosmic transformation. In New Age eschatology, it is not just mankind that will be made new, but the whole biosphere. Goodwin may have a point when he says that Darwinism bears a family resemblance to some Christian views of history, though not entirely for the reasons he cites. Like the Augustinian model of history, Darwinian time is linear, of indefinite duration, and essentially "forward-looking," if not invariably meliorative. Both discourage the idea that we happen to live at a time of unique importance to the historical process. But another major Christian view of history is the millenarian, the daily expectation of unknown wonders. Like chaos theory, it is "nonlinear," and so friendly to surprises and discontinuities. This mode of thought may be the mode of the future—and not just in biology.

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Fossils by the River

Walking on the levee. I've brought my little girl
specifically here, for this moment of show.
The river rushes by; the water is filled with mud.
As if casually, I step down the levee's bank,
pick my way carefully through the limestone shards.
"What are you doing?" she calls.—"Looking for fossils."
"Fossils? Really?" and after some business
of fiddling with the props to perfect the scene,
I straighten my back in scientific poise,
holding a flat stone with three spirals etched.
"Here, take a look." I don't mention the fact:
All the limestone is shot through with fossils.
There are several in every fractured plane.
Break any stone open, you get a shell.
—But she is properly impressed with the tiniest wealth.
The river rushes by; the water is dark.
I am almost out of tricks. "For you," I say.

Craig Payne

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Hard Truths About the Culture War

Robert H. Bork

> What began to concern me more and more were the clear signs of rot and decadence germinating within American society—a rot and decadence that was no longer the consequence of liberalism but was the actual agenda of contemporary liberalism. . . . Sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos. It is an ethos that aims simultaneously at political and social collectivism on the one hand, and moral anarchy on the other.
>
> —Irving Kristol, "My Cold War"

Equivocation has never been Irving Kristol's long suit. About the fact of rot and decadence there can be no dispute, except from those who deny that such terms have meaning, and who are, for that reason, major contributors to rot and decadence. We are accustomed to lamentations about American crime rates, the devastation wrought by drugs, rising illegitimacy, the decline of civility, and the increasing vulgarity of popular entertainment. But the manifestations of American cultural decline are even more widespread, ranging across virtually the entire society, from the violent underclass of the inner cities to our cultural and political elites, from rap music to literary studies, from pornography to law, from journalism to scholarship, from union halls to universities. Wherever one looks, the traditional virtues of this culture are being lost, its vices multiplied, its values degraded—in short, the culture itself is unraveling.

These can hardly be random or isolated developments. A degeneration so universal, afflicting so many seemingly disparate areas, must proceed from common causes. That supposition is strengthened by the observation that similar trends seem to be occurring in nearly all Western industrialized democracies. The main features of these trends are vulgarity and a persistent left-wing bias, the latter being particularly evident among the semi-skilled intellectuals—academics, bureaucrats, and the like—that Kristol calls the New Class.

But why should this be happening? The short answer is the one Kristol gives: the rise of modern liberalism. (The extent to which he would agree with the following argument about the sources and future of modern liberalism, I do not know.) Modern liberalism grew out of classical liberalism by expanding its central ideals—liberty and equality—while progressively jettisoning the restraints of religion, morality, and law even as technology lowered the constraint of hard work imposed by economic necessity. Those ideals, along with the right to pursue happiness, are what we said we were about at the beginning, in the Declaration of Independence. Stirring as rallying cries for rebellion, less useful, because indeterminate, for the purpose of arranging political and cultural matters, they become positively dangerous when taken, without very serious qualifications, as social ideals.

The qualifications assumed by the founders' generation, but unexpressed in the Declaration (it would rather have spoiled the rhetoric to have added "up to a point"), have gradually been peeled away so that today liberalism has reached an extreme, though not one fears its ultimate, stage. "Equality" has become radical egalitarianism (the equality of outcomes rather than of opportunities), and "liberty" takes the form of radical individualism (a refusal to admit limits to the gratifications of the self). In these extreme forms, they are partly produced by, and partly produce, the shattering of fraternity (or com-

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munity) that modern liberals simultaneously long for and destroy.

Individualism and egalitarianism may seem an odd pair, since liberty in any degree produces inequality, while equality of outcomes requires coercion that destroys liberty. If they are to operate simultaneously, radical egalitarianism and radical individualism, where they do not complement one another, must operate in different areas of life, and that is precisely what we see in today's culture. Radical egalitarianism advances, on the one hand, in areas of life and society where superior achievement is possible and would be rewarded but for coerced equality: quotas, affirmative action, income redistribution through progressive taxation for some, entitlement programs for others, and the tyranny of political correctness spreading through universities, primary and secondary schools, government, and even the private sector. Radical individualism, on the other hand, is demanded when there is no danger that achievement will produce inequality and people wish to be unhindered in the pursuit of pleasure. This finds expression particularly in the areas of sexuality and violence, and their vicarious enjoyment in popular entertainment.

Individualism and egalitarianism do not always divide the labor of producing cultural decay. Often enough they collaborate. When egalitarianism reinforces individualism, denying the possibility that one culture or moral view can be superior to another, the result is cultural and moral relativism, whose end products include multiculturalism, sexual license, obscenity in the popular arts, an unwillingness to punish crime adequately and, sometimes, even to convict the obviously guilty. Both the individualist and the egalitarian (usually in the same skin) are antagonistic to society's traditional hierarchies or lines of authority—the one because his pleasures can be maximized only by freedom from authority, the other because he resents any distinction among people or forms of behavior that suggests superiority in one or the other.

The universality of these forces is indicated by the fact that they are prominent features of two institutions at opposite ends of the cultural spectrum: the Supreme Court of the United States and rock music.

The Court reflects modern cultural trends most obviously when it invents new rights of the individual against the decisions of the political community, but it also does so in the expansion of rights expressed in the Constitution beyond anything the drafters and ratifiers could have intended. Radical individualism surfaced when the Court created a right of privacy, supposedly about the sanctity of the marital bedchamber, which soon explicitly became a right of individual autonomy unconnected to privacy. Four justices subsequently pronounced it a "moral fact that a person belongs to himself and not others nor to society as a whole"—a "fact" which means that a person has no obligations outside his own skin. The same tendency is seen in the Court's drive to privatize religion, as when a girl is held to have a First Amendment right not to have to sit at graduation through a short prayer because it might offend her sensibilities. The list could be extended almost indefinitely. The autonomy the Court requires, of course, is necessarily selective, almost invariably consisting of the freedoms preferred by modern liberalism.

The Court's commitment to egalitarianism is so strong that it overrode the explicit language and legislative history of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to allow preferences for blacks and women. The Court usually argued that the preferences were for prior discrimination, discrimination not against the individuals now benefited but against other members of their race or sex in the past. Even that requirement was dropped when the Court allowed preferences for minorities in the grant of station licenses by the Federal Communications Commission, despite the lack of any evidence that such grants had ever been tainted by discrimination. In these ways the Court reflects, and hence illegitimately legitimates, the thrusts of modern liberal culture.

To point the parallel: in a book appropriately titled *The Triumph of Vulgarity*, Robert Pattison points out that rock music celebrates the unconstrained self: "The extrovert, the madman, the criminal, the suicide, or the exhibitionist can rise to heroic stature in rock for the same reasons that Byron or Raskolnikov became romantic heroes—profligacy and murder are expressions of an emotional intensity that defies the limits imposed by nature and society." Rock culture teaches egalitarianism as well, not only in its frequent advocacy of revolution, but in its refusal to make distinctions about morality or aesthetics based upon any transcendent principle. There is no such principle, only sensation, energy, the pleasure of the moment, and the expansion of the self.

Vulgarity and obscenity are, of course, rife in popular culture. Rock is followed by rap; television situation comedies and magazine advertising increasingly rely on explicit sex; such cultural icons as Roseanne Barr and Michael Jackson can be seen on family-oriented television clutching their crotches. The prospect is for more and worse. Companies are now doing billions of dollars' worth of business in pornographic videos, and volume is increasing rapidly. They are acquiring inventories of the videos for cable television; and a nationwide chain of pornographic video and retail stores is in the works. One pay-per-view network operator says, "This thing is a freight train."

It is likely to become a rocket ship soon if, as George Gilder predicts, computers replace television,

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allowing viewers to call up digital films and files of news, art, and multimedia from around the world. He dismisses conservatives' fears that "the boob tube will give way to what H. L. Mencken might have termed a new Boobissimus, as the liberated children rush away from the network nurse, chasing Pied Piper pederasts, snuff-film sadists, and other trolls of cyberspace." Gilder concedes, "Under the sway of television, democratic capitalism enshrines a Gresham's law; bad culture drives out good, and ultimately porn and prurience, violence and blasphemy prevail everywhere from the dimwitted 'news' shows to the lugubrious movies." But he blames that on the nature of broadcast technology, which requires central control and reduces the audience to its lowest common denominator of tastes and responses.

But the computer will give everyone his own channel: "The creator of a program on a specialized subject—from Canaletto's art to chaos theory, from GM car transmission repair to cowboy poetry, from Szechuan restaurant finance to C++ computer codes—will be able to reach everyone in the industrialized world who shares the interest."

Perhaps. But there seems little reason to think there will not also be an enormous increase in obscene and violent programs. Many places already have fifty or more cable channels, including some very good educational channels, but there are still MTV's music videos, and the porn channels are coming on line. The more private viewing becomes, the more likely that salacious and perverted tastes will be indulged. That is suggested by the explosion of pornographic film titles and profits when videocassettes enabled customers to avoid going to "adult" theaters. Another boom should occur when those customers don't even have to ask for the cassettes in a store. The new technology, while it may bring the wonders Gilder predicts, will almost certainly make our culture more vulgar and violent.

The leader of the revolution in pornographic video, referred to admiringly by a competitor as the Ted Turner of the business, offers the usual defenses of decadence: "Adults have a right to see [pornography] if they want to. If it offends you, don't buy it." Modern liberalism employs the rhetoric of "rights" incessantly to delegitimize restraints on individuals by communities. It is a pernicious rhetoric because it asserts a right without giving reasons. If there is to be anything that can be called a community, the case for previously unrecognized individual freedoms must be thought through, and "rights" cannot win every time.

The second notion—"If it offends you, don't buy it"—is both lulling and destructive. Whether you buy it or not, you will be greatly affected by those who do. The aesthetic and moral environment in which you and your family live will be coarsened and brutalized. There are economists who confuse the idea that markets should be free with the idea that everything should be on the market. The first idea rests on the efficiency of the free market in satisfying wants; the second raises the question of which wants it is moral to satisfy. The latter question brings up the topic of externalities: you are free not to make steel, but you will be affected by the air pollution of those who do make it. To complaints about pornography and violence on television, libertarians reply, "All you have to do is hit the remote control and change channels." But, like the person who chooses not to make steel, you and your family will be affected by the people who do not change the channel. As Michael Medved puts it, "To say that if you don't like the popular culture then turn it off, is like saying, if you don't like the smog, stop breathing. . . . There are Amish kids in Pennsylvania who know about Madonna." And their parents can do nothing about that.

Can there be any doubt that as pornography and violence become increasingly popular and accessible entertainment, attitudes about marriage, fidelity, divorce, obligations to children, the use of force, and permissible public behavior and language will change, and with the change of attitudes will come changes in conduct, both public and private? The contrary view must assume that people are unaffected by what they see and hear. Advertisers bet billions the other way. Advocates of liberal arts education assure us those studies improve character; it is not very likely that only uplifting culture affects attitudes and behavior. "Don't buy it" and "Change the channel" are simply advice to accept a degenerating culture and its consequences.

Modern liberalism also presses our politics to the left because egalitarianism is hostile to the authorities and hierarchies—moral, religious, social, economic, and intellectual—that are characteristic of a bourgeois or traditional culture and a capitalist economy. Yet modern liberalism is not hostile to hierarchy as such. Egalitarianism requires hierarchy because equality of condition cannot be achieved or approximated without coercion. The coercers will be bureaucrats and politicians who will, and already do, form a new elite class. Political and governmental authority replace the authorities of family, church, profession, and business. The project is to sap the strength of these latter institutions so that individuals stand bare before the state, which, liberals assume with considerable justification, they will administer. We will be coerced into virtue, as modern liberals define virtue: a ruthlessly egalitarian society. This agenda is, of course, already well advanced.

Both diminished performance and personal injustice are accomplished through radically egalitarian measures. Quotas and affirmative action, for example, are common and increasing not only in the workplace but in university admissions, faculty hiring, and promotion. The excuse is past discrimi-

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nation, but the result is that individuals who have never been discriminated against are preferred to individuals who have never discriminated, regardless of their respective achievements. Predictably, the result is anger on both sides and an increasingly polarized society. After years of struggle to emplace the principle of reward according to achievement, the achievement principle is being jettisoned for one of reward according to birth once more.

Remarkably little thought attends this process. The demand is always for more equality, but no egalitarian ever specifies how much equality will be enough. And so the leveling process grinds insensately on. The *Wall Street Journal* recently reprinted a Kurt Vonnegut story, which the paper retitled "It Seemed Like Fiction" because it was written "in 1961, before the passage of the Equal Pay Act (1963), the Civil Rights Act (1964), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (1967), the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (1972), the Rehabilitation Act (1973), the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), the Older Workers' Benefit Protection Act (1990), and the Civil Rights Act (1991)." At the time of reprinting, Congress was preparing hearings on "The Employment Nondiscrimination Act of 1994" and was considering additional amendments to the Civil Rights Act. Even before all this, Vonnegut saw the trend and envisioned the day when Americans would achieve perfect equality: persons of superior intelligence required to wear mental handicap radios that emit a sharp noise every twenty seconds to keep them from taking unfair advantage of their brains, persons of superior strength or grace burdened with weights, those of uncommon beauty forced to wear masks. Why not?

Modern liberalism is most particularly a disease of our cultural elites, the people who control the institutions that manufacture or disseminate ideas, attitudes, and symbols—universities, some churches, Hollywood, the national press (print and electronic), much of the congressional Democratic party and some of the congressional Republicans as well, large sections of the judiciary, foundation staffs, and almost all the "public interest" organizations that exercise a profound if largely unseen effect on public policy. So pervasive is the influence of those who occupy the commanding heights of our culture that it is not entirely accurate to call the United States a majoritarian democracy. The elites of modern liberalism do not win all the battles, but despite their relatively small numbers, they win more than their share and move the culture always in one direction.

This is not a conspiracy but a syndrome. These are people who view the world from a common perspective, a perspective to the left of the attitudes of the general public. Two explanations for this phenomenon have been advanced. Both seem accurate. One is a heretical version of Marxism, a theory of class warfare; the other might be called a heretical version of religion, a theory of the hunger for spirituality, for a meaning to life.

Joseph Schumpeter first articulated the idea that capitalism requires and hence produces a large intellectual class. The members of that class are not necessarily very good at intellectual work; they are merely people who work with or transmit ideas at wholesale or retail, the folks collectively referred to above as the New Class (also known as the "knowledge class," the "class of semiskilled intellectuals," or the "chattering class").

Why should the New Class be hostile to traditional or bourgeois society? The answer, according to the class warfare theory, is that capitalism bestows its favors, money, and prestige on the business class. The New Class, filled with resentment and envy, seeks to enhance its own power and prestige by attacking capitalism, its institutions, and its morality. It is necessary to attack from the left because America has never had an aristocratic ethos and because the weapons at hand are by their nature suited to the left. The ideas are held not for their merit but because they are weapons.

There is probably a good deal to this, but it seems not quite sufficient. For one thing, it does not account for the Hollywood left. These are folks with no need whatever to envy the CEO of General Motors his prestige or financial rewards. And no one, to my knowledge, has ever classified Barbra Streisand, Jane Fonda, Ed Asner, and Norman Lear as intellectuals.

There is, however, an additional theory. Max Weber noted the predicament of intellectuals in a world from which "ultimate and sublime values" have been withdrawn: "The salvation sought by an intellectual is always based on inner need. . . . The intellectual seeks in various ways, the casuistry of which extends to infinity, to endow his life with a pervasive meaning." The subsidence of religion leaves a void that must be filled. Richard Grenier observes that among those intellectuals "most subject to longings for meaning, Max Weber listed, prophetically: university professors, clergymen, government officials . . . 'coupon clippers' . . . journalists, school teachers, 'wandering poets.'" By "coupon clippers," I take it, Weber meant the generations that inherit the wealth of the men who made it, which would explain why so many foundations created by wealthy conservatives become liberal when the children or grandchildren take over. And for "wandering poets," read the likes of Robert Redford and Warren Beatty. The epitome of Weber's university professors is John Rawls, whose egalitarian theory of justice swept the academy. Among other odd notions, Rawls laid it down that no inequalities are just unless they benefit the most disadvantaged members of society. There is, of course, no good reason for such a rule, and it is a

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prescription for permanent hostility to actual societies, and most particularly that of the United States, which can never operate in that fashion. No vital society could.

What we are seeing in modern liberalism is the ultimate triumph of the New Left of the 1960s—the New Left that collapsed as a unified political movement and splintered into a multitude of intense, single-issue groups. We now have, to name but a few, radical feminists, black extremists, animal rights groups, radical environmentalists, activist homosexual groups, multiculturalists, People for the American Way, Planned Parenthood, the American Civil Liberties Union, and many more. In a real sense, however, the New Left did not collapse. Each of its splinters pursues a leftist agenda, but there is no publicly announced overarching philosophy that enables people to see easily that the separate groups and causes add up to a general radical left philosophy. The groups support one another and come together easily on many issues. In that sense, the splintering of the New Left made it less visible and therefore more powerful, its goals more attainable, than ever before.

In their final stages, radical egalitarianism becomes tyranny and radical individualism descends into hedonism. These translate as bread and circuses. Government grows larger and more intrusive in order to direct the distribution of goods and services in an ever more equal fashion, while people are diverted, led to believe that their freedoms are increasing, by a great variety of entertainments featuring violence and sex. David Frum argues that the root of our trouble is big government, but the root of big government is the egalitarian passion, which intimidates even many conservatives. So long as that passion persists, government is likely only to get bigger and more intrusive.

We sometimes console ourselves with the thought that our current moral anarchy and statism are merely one phase of a pendulum's swing, that in time the pendulum will swing the other way. No doubt such movements and countermovements are often observable, but it is entirely possible that they are merely ephiphenomena that do not affect the larger movement of the culture. After each swing the bottom of the pendulum's arc is always further to the cultural and political left. Certainly, in the United States, we have never experienced a period of cultural depravity and governmental intrusiveness to rival today's condition.

The prospects look bleak, moreover, if we reflect on the sources of modern liberalism's components. The root of egalitarianism lies in envy and insecurity, which are in turn products of self-pity, arguably the most pervasive and powerful emotion known to mankind. The root of individualism lies in self-interest, not always expressed as a desire for money but also for power, celebrity, pleasures, and titillations of all varieties. Western civilization, of course, has been uniquely individualistic. Envy and self-interest often have socially beneficial results, but when fully unleashed, freed of constraints, their consequences are rot, decadence, and statism.

Because they arise out of fundamental human emotions, it is obvious that individualism and egalitarianism were not invented in the 1960s. They have been working inexorably through Western civilization for centuries, perhaps for millennia, but they have only recently overcome almost all obstacles to their full realization. These forces were beneficent for most of their careers; they produced the glories of our civilization and, freed of the restraints of the past, became malignant only in this century. We are delighted that the restraints that afflicted men in the classical world, in the Middle Ages, even in the last century and much of this have been weakened or removed. Our names for particular events and eras celebrate that movement: the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, our own Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights, the Civil Rights Movement. Though they had other complex effects, all involved the loosening of restraints: religious, legal, and moral. But any progression can at last go too far.

The constraints that made individualism and egalitarianism beneficial included economic necessity, which channeled individualism into productive work, and religion (with its corollaries of morality and law), which tempered self-interest and envy. It is only in this century, and particularly in the years since World War II, that Americans have known an affluence that frees many of us from absorption with making a living, and it is in that same period that the decline in religion, which began centuries ago, reached its low point. Religious belief remains strong but seems to have a diminishing effect on behavior. And only lately have we developed the technologies that not only make work easier but also make the opportunities for sensation almost boundless. We have always known that unfettered human nature does not present an attractive face, but it is that face that is coming into view as modern liberalism progresses. It is difficult to imagine the constraints that could now be put in place to do the work that economic necessity and religion once did.

If the drive of modern liberalism cannot be blunted and then reversed, we are also likely to see an increasingly inefficient economy. The hedonism of radical individualism is not consistent with the habits of work and saving that are essential to a vigorous economy. The quotas and affirmative action that are growing in our educational institutions and in our corporations, the dilution of the achievement principle, coupled with the government's determination to intervene in the economy through manifold regulations, mandates, and taxes, will place additional burdens on productivity. Despite all we have learned

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from watching other economies, perhaps we are fated to repeat the socialist mistakes and suffer the inevitable consequences.

This is a picture of a bleak landscape, and there are many who disagree. Optimists point out, for example, that American culture is complex and resilient, that it contains much that is good and healthy, that many families continue to raise children with strong moral values. All that is true. I have been describing trends, not the overall condition of the culture, but the trends have been running the wrong way, dramatically so in the past thirty years. It would be difficult to contend that, the end of racial segregation aside, American culture today is superior to, or even on a par with, the culture of the 1950s.

Others might argue that the elections of 1994 are an indication that a cultural swing is taking place, that Americans have rejected huge, regulation-happy government. That may be so, but I remember thinking the same thing in November 1980 when the electorate chose Ronald Reagan and defeated a clutch of the most liberal Senators. But little long-term improvement occurred. Government now regulates more than it did then. It was fifteen years between Reagan's first inauguration and the Republican domination of Congress. We will know that a sea change has happened if, fifteen years from now, government is smaller, less expensive, and less intrusive.

Modern liberalism, moreover, maintains its hold on the institutions that shape values and manipulate symbols. Hollywood and the network evening news will not change their ways because of Republican majorities. Political correctness and multiculturalism will not be ejected from the universities by Newt Gingrich. If the reaction of the left to Reagan's elections is any guide, modern liberalism will become more aggressive and intolerant. In any event, even a persistently conservative government can do little to deal with social deterioration other than stop subsidizing it through welfare, and it remains to be seen whether Republicans have the will to overcome the constituencies that want welfare. Moral decay is evident, moreover, among people who are not on welfare and never will be.

No one can be certain of the future, of course. Cultures in decline have, unpredictably, turned themselves around before. Perhaps ours will too. Perhaps, ultimately, we will become so sick of the moral and aesthetic environment that is growing in America that stricter standards will be imposed democratically or by moral disapproval. Perhaps we will reject a government that is controlling more and more of our lives. A hopeful sign is the degree to which modern liberalism and its works—political correctness, affirmative action, multiculturalism, and the like—is coming under intellectual attack, not merely from conservative but also from liberal intellectuals. If its intellectual and moral bankruptcy is repeatedly exposed, perhaps modern liberalism will die of shame.

But then again, perhaps not. Country singer and social philosopher Merle Haggard, whose perspective is like Irving Kristol's, says that the decade of the 1960s "was just the evening of it all. I think we're into the dead of night now." Chances are, that is too optimistic and the dead of night still lies ahead. For the immediate future, in any event, what we probably face is an increasingly vulgar, violent, chaotic, and politicized culture and, unless the conservative resurgence of 1994 is both long-lasting and effective, an increasingly incompetent, bureaucratic, and despotic government. Kristol refers to himself as a cheerful pessimist. If the argument here is even close to the mark, and if the counterattack falls short, we had all better start working on the cheerful part. FT

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Jesus and the World Religions

J. A. Di Noia

Is Jesus Christ the unique mediator of salvation? I was one of five panelists assigned to address this question at a recent meeting of Catholic theologians. I was the first to speak and, as it turned out, the only panelist prepared to advance an unqualified affirmative response to the question. Why is this? Why would a group of Catholic theologians decline to affirm what, until recently, would have been considered an unquestionable tenet of ecumenical Christian faith?

As the session unfolded, it became clear that their reluctance to do so was motivated at least in part by a desire to avoid giving offense to religious people of other traditions. The underlying premise of their remarks and of the ensuing discussion seemed to be this: To ascribe a uniquely salvific role to Jesus Christ would constitute a denial of the salvific role of other religious founders (like the Buddha and Muhammad) and thus would be an affront to their communities.

The way that many theologians think about this issue has been influenced by the pluralist theology of religions popularized by John Hick, Paul Knitter, and others. Indeed, Paul Knitter was one of the panelists at the session mentioned above. In a nutshell, pluralists claim that in one way or another all religions aim at salvation. In John Hick's influential definition, salvation is the movement from self-centeredness to "Reality-centeredness." Since, according to pluralists, ultimate Reality is incomprehensible and ineffable, no one religious description can claim primacy over rival descriptions, and no tradition can claim exclusive rights to the means of salvation.

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In the pluralist perspective, therefore, each religious founder must be regarded as in some sense a savior. Exclusive or unique status with respect to the knowledge of, provision for, or access to, salvation can no more be claimed for Jesus of Nazareth than it can be claimed for Gautama the Buddha or for Muhammad. Naturally, pluralists do not deny that these founders were unique historical personalities. What they deny is that any one of them could provide a uniquely privileged or exclusive access to salvation.

It follows for pluralists that Christian theologians cannot give a simple affirmative answer to the question, Is Jesus Christ the unique mediator of salvation? On the basis of their study of religious traditions, pluralist philosophers and theologians contend that salvation, though diversely mediated, is nonetheless universally accessible. It is not just in order to avoid giving offense to other religious people that pluralists have championed this view. Pluralists argue on empirical and philosophical grounds that a soteriological structure underlies all religious traditions and thus variously orients their adherents to "Reality" as it is diversely figured in these traditions. Only in this way can Christian theologians affirm the universality of salvation and of religious truth, at least as possibilities, without giving offense to other religious people.

To be sure, pluralists are not the only theologians who have been concerned with the salvation of persons who are not Christians. According to the typology prevailing in current theology of religions, the chief alternative positions on this issue are represented by exclusivism and inclusivism. In contrast to pluralists, both exclusivists and inclusivists would have no difficulty in giving an affirmative answer to the question, Is Jesus Christ the unique mediator of salvation? For all their sharp differences, exclusivists and inclusivists concur in their avowal of the uniquely salvific role of Christ. But exclusivists deny the possibility of salvation for non-Christians who do

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not before death explicitly profess faith in Christ. Inclusivists, on the other hand, allow for the possibility of salvation chiefly on the grounds of some form of implicit faith in Christ, combined with a morally upright life, on the part of non-Christians.

The Christian concern not to give offense to other religious people is a praiseworthy one, while the concern to allow for the possibility of their salvation is a doctrinally crucial one. But suppose that, far from being an affront to other religious traditions, a strong Christian affirmation of the uniqueness of Christ's salvific role were fundamental to traditional Christian universalism. Suppose, in other words, that the particularity of salvation in Christ were nonexclusive. Suppose, further, that an affirmation of this nonexclusive particularity of salvation in Christ were not an obstacle to but a condition for genuine respect for other religious people.

This position, which I have long argued for, rests not only on central Christian doctrines but also on the suggestion that "salvation" is not a term that encompasses what all religions seek, but is a properly Christian designation for that which should be sought above all else in life. Salvation has a distinctively Christian content: transformation in Christ with a view to ultimate communion with the triune God. Even where other religious communities employ the term "salvation," their conceptions of the aim of life differ from one another and from that espoused by Christian communities. By framing the agenda of theology of religions primarily in terms of the possibility of extra-Christian salvation, pluralists and inclusivists often fail to give enough weight to the specificity and distinctiveness of religious aims. Inclusivists fail to notice their distinctiveness because they tend to reinterpret non-Christian patterns and aims in Christian terms. More at the center of attention here, however, are pluralists who make salvation an all-encompassing designation for the variety of aims that religious traditions espouse and commend.

If the issues at stake were framed differently, it might turn out that to affirm Christ's unique role in salvation is not to exclude persons who are not Christians but to embrace them. In other words, it might turn out that we could give a strong affirmative answer to the question, Is Jesus Christ the unique mediator of salvation? and still both show respect for other religious people and include them in the final consummation of all things for which we have reason, only in Christ, to hope.

In order to reframe these issues, and at the same time to identify what seems to be the weakness especially of typical pluralist approaches to them, let us engage in an experiment. Let us compare the question, Is Jesus Christ the unique mediator of salvation? with the question, Is the Buddha the unique revealer of the Dharma?

Suppose that I pose this second question to a Buddhist friend. Along with most other Buddhists, she will answer it affirmatively. The Dharma comprises all that concerns Nirvana and its attainment. Even though Buddhists commonly insist that knowledge of the Dharma is in principle accessible to anyone, still they regard Gautama's discovery and teaching of the Dharma as unique in this era.

Consider how the conversation might proceed at this point. If my Buddhist friend should caution me that I will never attain Nirvana by following the course of life laid out for me by the Christian community, I do not feel anxious about this. I have not been persuaded that seeking Nirvana is what I should be doing. If I did begin to be persuaded of this, then I should undertake to discover the path and try to make my way along it. I would, in other words, have begun to be a follower of the Buddha. I might even then join a Buddhist community, or at least become an inquirer. Some Catholics I know have done this very thing. But if I continue to be convinced that it is salvation that I should be seeking and that Christ is the unique mediator of this salvation, then I would continue on the Christian path.

One thing to notice about this hypothetical encounter between me and my Buddhist friend is that I have not felt affronted by her warning that I shall not attain Nirvana unless I follow the Excellent Eightfold Path taught uniquely by the Buddha. On the contrary, my initial reaction is that what she has said to me makes perfect sense. If the Excellent Eightfold Path is the way to Nirvana, and if I do not choose to pursue this path, then it follows that I may not reach Nirvana. But, since I have as yet no desire to attain and enjoy Nirvana, I am not offended by this reasoning. I have not been persuaded that Nirvana is what I should be seeking.

Without trying to field a "definition" of religion—something that has proven notoriously difficult to do—we could say that the Christian community and the Buddhist community (with their various subcommunities) each seems to have some conception of an ultimate aim of life and has developed a pattern of life geared toward attaining it. Other major religious communities share this tendency as well. What is ultimate, whether it be a transcendent agent or an as yet unrealized state of being, invades life at every moment, and summons the community's members to order and shape their lives in view of this aim. The world's religious communities differ in their descriptions of the aims that are ultimate in this sense (e.g., the extinction of the self or communion with the triune God) as well as in their provision for the cultivation of patterns of life ordered to the attainment and enjoyment of such aims (e.g., the Dharma or the gospel). But they seem to agree in espousing and commending comprehensive aims of life, and in striving to shape the lives of their members with a view to those aims.

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We can now formulate a preliminary result of the consideration of the hypothetical conversation between me and my Buddhist friend. If the assertion "The Buddha is the unique revealer of the Dharma" is not offensive to me, then why should the assertion "Jesus Christ is the unique mediator of salvation" be offensive to Buddhists, or, for that matter, to Muslims, Vedantists, or Jews? A rabbi once said to me, revealingly: "Jesus Christ is the answer to a question I have never asked." This remark suggests that we might be on the right track in our reflections. Salvation in the Christian sense, it implies, is not what the rabbi is seeking. Asking the question to which Jesus Christ is the answer commits oneself to an inquiry (logically speaking) that may lead to the adoption of a Christian way of life. At least in part, this will mean that what Christians aim for, as expressed by the umbrella term "salvation," has begun to look appealing or even ultimately important. One might conclude: This is what I should be aiming for in my life. But what would this be?

When Christians try to answer this question, we find ourselves becoming quite specific. When we try to say what comprises salvation, we find ourselves talking about the triune God; the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; grace, sin, and justification; transfiguration and divinization; faith, hope, and charity; the commandments and the moral virtues; and many other characteristically Christian things as well. We should not be surprised if, in trying to answer a cognate question, a member of another religious community, say a Buddhist, should also become very specific about Nirvana and all that bears on its attainment. We should not be surprised, furthermore, if the descriptions of salvation and Nirvana do not coincide. But, for the moment, let us continue the experiment by sketching some of the things that a Christian description of salvation might have to include.

Allowing for variations across its various subcommunities, we can understand the ecumenical Christian community to teach that the ultimate aim of life is a communion of life—a communion of life with the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. According to ecumenical Christian faith, this is a truth proclaimed by Christ and a destiny made possible for us by his passion, death, and resurrection. This is what Christians mean by salvation: the term embraces both the goal of ultimate communion and the empowerment to attain and enjoy it.

Human beings are called to nothing less than communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and with each other in them. Indeed, Christianity affirms that the triune God could not bring about a more intimate union with created persons than that which has already been initiated in baptism and will be fulfilled for us in Christ. Ultimate communion involves nothing less than becoming part of the trinitarian family. The principle and agent of this communion for us is Christ. Just as Christ is Son by nature—a member of the divine family of the Trinity in virtue of his being the Son of the Father—so human persons are to be sons and daughters by adoption. Our fellowship with Christ and with each other in him brings us into the divine trinitarian family.

But if we are destined to enjoy this ultimate communion, then we must change. We must become fit for it. Interpersonal communion with God is only "natural" to uncreated persons; for created persons, who are also sinners, such communion is possible only through justification and grace. Through the redeeming grace of Christ and, specifically, through the transformation that this grace makes possible, we are rendered "fit" participants in the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our transformation will be a conformation: the more we become like Christ, the more surely do we discover our true selves, the unique persons created by the triune God to share in the divine life and to enjoy the personal life of the Trinity. As Catholics pray in one of the Sunday prefaces, "Father . . . You sent him as one like ourselves, though free from sin, that you might see and love in us what you see and love in him."

However, this conformation does not amount to a mere conformity. The conformation to Christ that is the principle of our transformation is not a mere cloning but the realization of our distinctive and unique personal identities. This must be so, for otherwise the communion to which this transformation is directed could not be consummated. The image of God in us consists precisely in the spiritual capacities for knowing and loving that make interpersonal communion possible. But authentic interpersonal communion presupposes the full realization of the individual persons who enter into it. Thus, if Christ is to be the principle and pattern of our transformation, in being conformed to him we must each discover and realize our own unique identities as persons, and be healed of the sinful dispositions that obstruct the flourishing of our true selves.

This is the force of the astonishing saying of Christ:

> If a man wants to be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his life? Or what will he give in return for his life? (Matthew 16:24-26)

None of us, whether as teachers, parents, or pastors—no matter how inflated our conceptions of ourselves or how confident our sense of our abilities—would ever dare to say to anybody in our charge that they will find their true selves by imitating us. In effect,

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Christ asserts that an indefinite number of human persons will find their distinctive identities by being conformed to Christ. A moment's reflection shows us that only the Son of God could make such an assertion. No mere human could do so. Only the inexhaustibly rich perfect Image of God who is the Person of the Son in a human nature could constitute the principle and pattern for the transformation and fulfillment of every human person who has ever lived.

When Christians affirm that Jesus Christ is the unique mediator of salvation, something like the above can stand as a summary of what they mean. Leave aside for a moment the question whether such a description includes or excludes persons who are not Christians. What we need to consider first, as we continue to reflect on my hypothetical conversation with a Buddhist friend, is whether such a description of what Christians mean by salvation is offensive to persons who are not Christians—Buddhists, for example. Informed of what a Christian means by salvation, would there be reason for a Buddhist to feel excluded by the assertion that Jesus Christ is the unique mediator of salvation?

We have seen that salvation has a specific content for Christians: It entails an interpersonal communion, made possible by Christ, between human persons and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At least at first sight, this seems to be something very different from what Buddhists can be supposed to be seeking when they follow the Excellent Eightfold Path that leads them on the way to realizing enlightenment and the extinction of self in Nirvana. At least on the face of things, what Buddhists mean by "Nirvana" and what Christians mean by "salvation" do not seem to coincide. This does not mean that they are opposed; it remains to be seen whether seeking salvation and seeking Nirvana are complementary to each other or related in some as yet unspecified manner. However, it seems clear that interpersonal communion is a very different thing from the extinction of the self entailed in Nirvana. Many forms of Buddhism are concerned to cultivate dispositions that increasingly unmask the illusoriness of personal identity. As noted above, however, Christians understand personal identity to be of permanent, indeed eternal, significance because eternity centrally involves interpersonal communion.

Let us return to my hypothetical conversation with a Buddhist friend. We left the conversation at the point when she cautioned me that I would not reach Nirvana unless I followed the Excellent Eightfold Path. But this warning was not disturbing to me, for I do not want to attain Nirvana. Suppose that when the conversation resumes I offer a description of what Christians mean by salvation, a description not unlike the one presented above. Would we be surprised to find that my Buddhist friend wants no part of this? It is difficult for us to understand and accept that what we regard as most important—more so than anything else, absolutely speaking—other religious people challenge or repudiate. Buddhist communities in all their variety possess highly ramified teachings about the true aim of life and about the means to attain it. These teachings do not, at least on the surface, coincide with what Christians teach about these matters. Buddhists do not want ultimate communion; they do not seek it, and, insofar as they think about it, they may regard us as misguided for wanting and seeking it. For, by wanting and seeking ultimate communion, we remain, from a Buddhist point of view, incorrigibly attached to the very conceptions of personal identity that constitute the chief obstacle on the way to Nirvana.

Gautama the Buddha is the authority on these matters. He discovered and taught the Dharma, and through it attained enlightenment. His role in revealing the Dharma to others is regarded by most of his followers as something original, at least in the present epoch. Hence, while it makes good sense for Buddhists to affirm that the Buddha is the unique revealer of the Dharma, it makes little sense for them to be offended when Christians describe Jesus Christ as the unique mediator of salvation. Buddhists regard Christian beliefs about this as misguided and perhaps only partially true, but they will not be anxious or offended by such a Christian affirmation. They are not interested in seeking and attaining salvation as Christians understand it.

To be sure, some people—pluralists in particular—want to define "salvation" so broadly that it includes both what Christians mean by it and what Buddhists mean by Nirvana. On this account of things, my hypothetical encounter with a Buddhist friend would not present either of us with a choice between seeking Nirvana and seeking salvation. Some would say that to think that there is a serious choice here is, religiously speaking, overly literalistic and even simpleminded. Indeed, pluralists contend, precisely at this juncture the superiority of pluralist theology of religions is displayed. Pluralists argue that all religious communities advance their members toward specific aims—communion or enlightenment, as the case may be—that are surpassed or transcended by a more ultimate, but indescribable, aim. All religious communities seek this yet more ultimate aim with varying degrees of clarity and success. Not only is this conception closer to the truth of the matter, it also provides the basis for the sympathetic understanding, fruitful dialogue, and mutual respect that are desperately needed today.

In fact, however, this basic premise of pluralist theology of religions will not stand up under close scrutiny. Even if religious communities were prepared to accept some such description of what they are about it still remains true that they espouse and

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commend specific aims that differ from one another. Furthermore, these specific aims call forth distinctive patterns of life in each of the major religious traditions and in local traditions as well. Certain kinds of life are understood to foster the enjoyment of certain kinds of ends of life, and others to obstruct this enjoyment. This seems to be an ineradicable feature of the characteristic discourse and ethos of most religious communities. Individual lives come to be shaped by the ultimate aims that are sought. So even if the true aim of life were one that transcended the particular aims of all religious traditions, no one could seek it. No one could undertake to order life in such a way as to attain and enjoy an ultimate aim of life of which no description could be given.

But this goes directly against the grain of characteristic religious affirmation and conviction. Religious people, by and large, believe themselves to be in possession of understandings, incomplete though they may be, of what is ultimately important in life and how to orient life in its direction. Significant disagreements obtain among the major and local religious traditions about these matters. Pluralist theology of religions does not so much explain these disagreements as explain them away. In this way, pluralism seems to offer a massive redescription, rather than an interpretation, of religious beliefs and practices, and of the arresting differences among them.

Thus the following statements are not problematic in the way that many people, like those I joined on the theological panel, seem to think. "Jesus Christ is the unique mediator of salvation" and "The Buddha is the unique revealer of the Dharma." Were representatives of Christian or Buddhist communities to retreat from advancing such claims, it is not clear what they would have to offer to the world. There would be no compelling, or even interesting, reasons to persevere in membership in these communities, or indeed to seek it.

The great challenge facing present-day Christian theology of religions and interreligious conversation is to avoid minimizing the distinctive features of the major religious traditions through a well-intentioned universalism. Christian confidence in the universal scope of salvation rests on convictions about the historical career and perduring agency of Jesus Christ. Only if his identity is affirmed in its fullness—in accord with the holy Scripture, the great councils, and the Church's liturgy—as the Son of God who became man and died for us can the hope of Christians for themselves and for others be sustained. "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:19-20).

If the salvation that the triune God wills for the entire human race entails ultimate communion with the three persons, then the creaturely and sinful obstacles to this communion must be overcome. It has never been claimed that anyone but Jesus Christ could overcome these obstacles. Through him we are both healed and raised to an adoptive participation in the life of the Trinity. The obstacles to this participation are either overcome or not. If they are not overcome, then Christians have nothing for which to hope, for themselves or for others. In that case, they will hawk an empty universalism on the highways of the world. When Christians abandon the proclamation of Christ's unique mediatorship, they have no other mediatorship with which to replace it.

How persons who are not now explicit believers in Christ are to share in the salvation he alone makes possible is a large topic that I have not addressed here. But if Christians no longer confess Christ's unique mediatorship in making ultimate communion a real possibility for created persons, then the problem of how non-Christians can share in it is not resolved: it simply evaporates. True Christian universalism depends on the affirmation of the nonexclusive particularity of salvation in Jesus Christ. F1

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Work and Play

Michael Oakeshott

Without pretending to be scientific about it, the world may be imagined to be a vast collection of existences—things and substances of various compositions and kinds—each of which is what it is, and moves, changes, grows, or decays as it does by reason of its relation to other things: things existing in various ways by, and in some cases, at the expense of, or on, other things. This image is sometimes called the Economy of Nature, and it is sometimes said to have a "balance" or equilibrium of needs and satisfactions.

Human beings are recognizably part of this economy of nature. They are also what they are, and they move, change, grow, flourish, or decay as they do by reason of their relation to other things. Like the lion, the rosebush, or the iceberg, a human being has needs such that, if they are not supplied by his environment, he perishes.

Nevertheless, it has also been recognized that human beings have some characteristics that, at least partly, distinguish them from the other components of this natural world. The chief of these characteristics is commonly denoted by the Latin word *sapiens*, "intelligence." *Homo sapiens*: human beings distinguished by something called *intelligence*.

What "intelligence" means here is the ability and the propensity not merely to accept what the world happens to offer in satisfaction of needs but to seek for what it does not immediately offer, to adapt, to use, to appropriate, and to invent: the propensity to choose and to determine for ourselves what our relationship to the world shall be. And in this process, needs are replaced by wants. Indeed, to be "intelligent" means to be a creature not merely of needs that must be satisfied, but of wants that are imagined, chosen, and pursued. Needs are limited and are related to some notion of bare existence. Wants are inexhaustible because they are related to no fixed condition of things.

Human beings, then, are distinguished as creatures of wants. It is as a creature of wants that a human being has acquired, not only other characteristics that have been said to distinguish him (his disposition to make things, to fabricate, and his invention and use of tools), but also his peculiar attitude toward the world around him: both positive and intelligent.

This world—the whole of it, all its components without exception—he is disposed to think of as material for satisfying his wants. It is something to be used; it is something upon which he may impose his own purposes. It is something to be subjected to himself. It is almost an enemy to be conquered, and having been conquered, to be exploited.

Now, it is not to be supposed that this attitude to the world was acquired all at once. In bygone times there were sacrosanct trees that might not be used for firewood and holy animals that might not be slaughtered. And there are peoples (in India, for example) who have been more hesitant than we have been to acquire this view of the world, or (at any rate) hesitant about letting it become a dominant attitude. The ancient Romans, oddly enough, had a much more reverent attitude toward at least the earth than did the ancient Greeks (who regarded it much more as an enemy to be subdued). But by and large, the human race has come more and more to take the attitude that understands the world as material for satisfying wants.

Of course, human history has not been confined to this enterprise of doing and making, of using the resources of the world in order to achieve that sort of human happiness which comes from satisfying its

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inexhaustible wants. Other activities have been discovered that we shall come to later.

Moreover, there have always been some recognized limits to this enterprise. What we call morality is, in part, a refusal to take this attitude to other human beings, a refusal to regard them (like the other components of the natural world) simply as materials to be used.

But it can hardly be denied that the major part of human energies have been devoted, from earliest times, to this enterprise of using the resources of the world to satisfy our inexhaustible wants, or of making out of the world something that corresponds to our desires.

Some people have tended to think of this enterprise as mainly or fundamentally a matter of physical exertion. But this is an obvious mistake. It has been an enterprise of immense thought and intelligence.

In order to master the world and to use it for the satisfaction of human wants, we have had to learn from nature. And the knowledge that has made possible our current mastery of the world, knowledge of the qualities of the different components of the world and of their eligibility to be used in satisfying our wants, has been accumulated over thousands of years.

The inventiveness of human beings has devised new means for exploiting the natural resources of the world—tools and machines of all kinds; and materials have been contrived by human beings out of combinations of natural materials in order to satisfy new wants.

And all this knowledge and these skills have been handed down from generation to generation in an appropriate sort of education—an education in "useful knowledge," as we call it—knowledge that enables us to use nature to satisfy our wants.

Having moved from the realm of needs to the realm of wants, from desiring to live to desiring to live well (that is, better and better), and having acquired the uniquely human propensity to attempt things that we did not know quite how to achieve, we should not be surprised that the best energies have been spent on this enterprise.

Every success, every want satisfied in this enterprise, must be only a prelude to a new adventure. For how could this process be halted? Only by ceasing to have wants or by having wants that we choose not to satisfy. But many wants demand recurrent satisfaction, and it would be almost a contradiction to imagine refusing to give thought to how they might be satisfied better or more easily. And while men have often exercised choice, it has usually been a choice between which of their wants they will seek a satisfaction for now and which satisfactions shall for the moment be postponed. It is only the odd and rare individual who has made a choice to have done with wants—to turn back to needs.

It is not, then, surprising that this effort to achieve the sort of happiness that is to be had from satisfying human wants should have come to be regarded as "the great business and occupation of life" (as an eighteenth-century writer put it), and that it should have been given a name: "work."

"Work" is a continuous and toilsome activity, unavoidable in creatures moved by wants, in which the natural world is made to supply satisfaction for those wants. It is something from which animals are exempt, except those who have the misfortune to be harnessed to human enterprise, and it is something unknown to a creature of mere needs. Indeed, "work" is so far typical of the human species that it is reasonable to add it to the epithets by which we distinguish it: *Homo sapiens* is *Homo laborans* —a "worker."

The mastery of the human race over its natural environment has not, of course, been a uniform process. There have been periods of rapid advance, periods of relative stagnation, and even periods when useful knowledge about the world has been forgotten and skills have been lost. Wood, stone, and iron each were used and experimented with for long periods before even their simple uses were discerned.

We happen to live at a time when this process has been quite remarkably accelerated. And we know enough to be able to see the beginning of this acceleration about four centuries ago. There began to emerge at that time two beliefs that have gradually gained a firm hold upon us.

First, it came to be believed that "work" (this activity of exploiting the natural resources of the world for the satisfaction of human wants and the attitude towards the world that went with it) was not only typical of mankind but was our proper attitude and occupation. Indeed, it came to be believed that this ought to be the exclusive attitude and engagement to which all else should be subordinated.

This belief, that human activity ought to be directed towards promoting what John Locke called "the advantages and conveniences of life," and that the human mind ought to concern itself exclusively with gathering together and putting in order the sort of knowledge this enterprise demanded—useful knowledge—is a moral belief, that is, it is a belief about how we *ought* to spend our lives. And, as the normal way of thinking about moral obligations was to understand them as the commands of God, the first defense or justification of this belief was an attempt to show that this is what God commanded.

One of the earliest arguments was biblical. God, it was said, as recorded in the Book of Genesis, had given to mankind the natural world and everything in it; he had imposed no restriction whatever upon its exploitation for the satisfaction of human wants; and he had commanded mankind to use this gift. The natural world existed to serve human purposes.

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The sin of Adam modified this situation only to the extent that, instead of all our wants being automatically answered by nature, we were condemned to "work," to toil and pain, in order to satisfy them. Thus the proper pattern of human life was understood to spring from a divine gift, a divine command, and a divine penalty.

Now, this moral belief began to be partnered, about four centuries ago, by a second belief of a different sort—namely, an immense optimism about the success of this enterprise of compelling the natural world to satisfy human wants.

It was believed that if we only set about it in a really determined manner, if we bent all our energies and intelligence to it, if our efforts were unrelaxed, the human race in a relatively short time would actually achieve, perhaps finally achieve, the sort of happiness that is to be had from the satisfaction of wants.

Wants might proliferate; indeed, they surely would. But if we worked hard enough and intelligently enough, they would all be certainly satisfied. An all-out, organized assault upon nature would be followed by success. Idleness and inefficiency in exploiting the resoures of the natural world were not only sinful, they were also foolish.

This, perhaps, was the dream of a generation that was not only full of energy and fascinated by an enterprise in which it thought of itself as a pioneer, but whose imagination more readily embraced satisfactions than the new wants those satisfactions would generate. But it is the dream we have inherited; this is the tide that carries us along. It informs all our politics; it binds us to the necessity of a 4 percent per annum increase in productivity; and it is a dream we have spread about the world so that it has become the dream common to all mankind.

Since the sixteenth century, when the dream first began to take hold of European peoples, there have been some ups and downs of confidence. The nineteenth century was, in some respects, a notable period of depression and anxiety. What was called the Law of Diminishing Returns indicated that the work devoted to satisfying wants must become progressively less effective; and Malthus announced the depressing but undeniable truth that, if left to themselves, the number of those seeking satisfactions for their wants must increase faster than the supply of those satisfactions.

But these thoughts, which greatly depressed the Victorians, have inspired us with fresh energy, and I suppose that at no time in the history of the world has mankind been more determined to devote itself to exploitation of nature for the satisfaction of its wants, less dismayed at the proliferation of wants to be satisfied, or more confident of success.

This enterprise, I have suggested, is as old as the human race, as old as our emergence as creatures of wants rather than of needs. What is comparatively new is the faith and fervor with which it is pursued and the manner in which all else tends to be regarded as subordinate to the happiness that comes from the satisfaction of wants.

And yet there is something lacking in this happiness and something unsatisfying to human beings in this satisfaction. A creature composed entirely of wants, who understands the world merely as the means of satisfying those wants and whose satisfactions generate new wants endlessly, is a creature of unavoidable anxieties. If he is temporarily successful he may forget these anxieties; but he is in the position of a man who has mortgaged his future in a huge hire-purchase debt. And this has often been recognized, and not only during the last four centuries of our history when it has become particularly noticeable.

I do not mean merely the observation that this sort of happiness entails work and that work, because it is painful, is something less than wholly desirable. This has always been recognized. In the biblical story "work" itself is recognized as a defect, a punishment, a curse.

I mean something much more than this. I mean the recognition that to be a creature of wants—of desires that cannot have more than a temporary satisfaction because each satisfaction, however easily achieved, leads only to new wants—is itself a curse, a condemnation to a life in which every achievement is also a frustration.

It is not only that everything that is produced in satisfaction of a want rapidly perishes, or that many wants demand recurrent satisfactions, but that the satisfaction of every want generates a new want that in turn calls for satisfaction. Doing, and the attitude to the world it entails, is (as the hymn says) "a deadly thing." It is an activity of getting and spending, of making and consuming, endlessly.

Now, it has always been recognized that the life of a creature of wants is frustrating and unsatisfactory. And wherever this sort of life has tended to become predominant—as in the modern world—this recognition has become more acute.

Rousseau, for example, went back behind the biblical story and imagined a condition in which mankind had not yet discovered wants; it had only needs that the world satisfied easily and for the asking, and that consequently did not generate the attitude towards nature in which it is regarded as something to be conquered and used. Rousseau knew well enough that mankind could never return to this imaginary condition, but, because the frustration of wants was absent from it, he imagined it as a kind of Golden Age.

Further, many of the great religions (including Christianity) have, among other things, offered believers relief from the treadmill existence of the creature of wants in a very different view of the world and of the proper human activities. They have taught

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the happiness that comes from not having wants.

But apart from all this, and in spite of the fact that "work" and the satisfaction of wants has usually engaged the greater part of the attention of mankind, there is another form of activity, peculiar to human beings, that does not suffer from the defects inherent in "work" and the satisfaction of wants: "play."

The complete character of a human being does not come into view unless we add *Homo ludens*, man the player, to *Homo sapiens*, intelligent man, *Homo faber*, man the maker of things, and *Homo laborans*, man the worker.

I have used the word "work" in a wide sense, to stand for the activity of satisfying wants in a world like ours that can be made to satisfy wants but does not do so automatically. I shall also use the word "play" in a wide sense, to stand for an activity that, because it is not directed to the satisfaction of wants, entails an attitude to the world that is not concerned to use it, to get something out of it, or to make something of it, and offers satisfactions that are not at the same time frustrations.

This, indeed, is what we usually mean by "play." A game may, of course, be a contest for a prize, but this is always regarded as incidental. In its proper character a game is an experience of enjoyment that has no ulterior purpose, no further result aimed at, and begins and ends in itself. It is not a striving after what one has not got and it is not an assault upon nature to yield the satisfaction of a want.

Moreover, it is on account of these characteristics (which we emphasize when we say: "the game's the thing") that a game appears as a "free" activity. It may have rules of its own, and it may be played with energy and require effort, but it is emancipated from the seriousness, the purposefulness, and the alleged "importance" of "work" and the satisfaction of wants.

"Play," in short, stands for something that is neither "work" nor "rest." It is an activity, but not an activity that seeks the satisfaction of wants. For this reason, Aristotle called it "non-laborious activity"—activity that nevertheless is not "work." It is a "leisure" activity, not only because it belongs to the occasions when we are set free (or set ourselves free) from "work," but because it is performed in a "leisurely" manner. A "leisurely" manner does not mean merely "slowly"; it means, "without the anxieties and absence of cessation that belong to the satisfaction of wants."

To try to understand and to explain the world, or any part or aspect of it, obviously entails an attitude towards the world that is not one in which it is regarded as material that can be used to satisfy wants.

The aim of *work* is to change the world, to use it, to make something out of it; the aim of *explanation* is to illuminate the world, to see it as it is. The aim of *work* is to exert power over the hostile world, to subdue it, and to extract from it what may be useful for satisfying wants; the aim of *understanding* is to discern the intelligibility of the world. The aim of *work* is to impress some temporary human purpose upon some component of the world; the aim of *explanation* is to reveal the world as it is and not merely in respect of its potential to satisfy human wants.

It is, then, in the thoughts of philosophers, of scientists, and of historians that the great explanatory adventures of mankind are to be found. Philosophy, science, and history are different adventures into this realm of understanding and explanation. In pursuing any of them we are emancipated from the whole attitude towards the world that looks upon it as material for satisfying wants and from the anxieties that belong to this attitude.

I have not forgotten that I said that using the world for the satisfaction of wants is a mental activity and that it requires thought and knowledge—knowledge of the different qualities and characteristics of the components of the world. What I want to suggest is that this knowledge should not be confused with scientific knowledge, and that winning this sort of knowledge is not to be confused with the scientific enterprise of understanding and explaining.

Of course, the thoughts about the world that scientists have had and the discoveries that they have made are often eligible to be used for the exploitation of the resources of the world for the satisfaction of human wants. But science itself is a great intellectual adventure of understanding and explaining that is free from the necessity of providing useful knowledge. What we have here are two entirely different attitudes towards the world: the one concerned with truth and error, the other with what is useful or useless; the one concerned to understand the world and the other concerned to discover how the world works in order to make use of it.

Philosophy, science, and history are, then, activities that belong not to "work" but to "play." In pursuing them or in reading the thoughts of those who pursue them we are not, strictly speaking, "working" but "playing."

The activity of the poetic imagination is perhaps even more securely insulated from any liability of being confused with the satisfaction of wants than these explanatory activities. It is also less likely to be corrupted by it.

The practical imagination of the statesman or of people in business that sees what use the world can be put to, and that foresees the condition of things that will appear when they have imposed what they imagined upon the world, cannot be confused with the poetic imagination.

The practical is a dream to be followed by an effort to make it come true; the poetic is a dream enjoyed for its own sake. The world for the poet is not material to be used for satisfying wants, it is something to be contemplated. Poets allow the world to form itself

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around them without any urge to make it different from what it is. Poetic imagination is not a preliminary to doing something, it is an end in itself. It is not "work." It is "play."

To the ancient Greeks, who thought about these things, this seemed to be much more clearly the case with what they called the "musical arts," the arts of poetry, dancing, music, and acting. They therefore distinguished these (which belonged to the Muses) from other arts—the arts like sculpture and painting that seemed to them to have so great an element of using the materials of the world that they qualified to be understood as crafts rather than arts and that were given not to the Muses but to a god of "work." But I think we have risen above this distinction and can recognize in the activity of the painter and the sculptor, no less than in that of the poet and the dancer, the emancipation from the "deadliness of doing" that distinguishes art from "work."

My main point has been to suggest that, apart from "work," the activity of using the world to satisfy human wants, mankind has devised or stumbled upon other activities and attitudes towards the world, the activities I have grouped together as "play." It is in these activities that human beings have believed themselves to enjoy a freedom and an illumination that the satisfaction of wants can never supply. It is not *Homo sapiens* and *Homo laborans,* the clever users of the resources of the world, but *Homo ludens,* the one engaged in the activities of "play," who is the civilized one.

The gifts these activities offer us are easily recognizable. But the activities themselves are vulnerable and easily corrupted. Our way of living has generated an enormous pressure not merely to make the satisfaction of wants the center of our attention but to subordinate all other activities to it. This way lies corruption of "play."

Instead of regarding "work" and "play" as two great and diverse experiences of the world, each offering us what the other lacks, we are often encouraged to regard all that I have called "play" either as a holiday designed to make us "work" better when it is over or merely as "work" of another sort.

In the first of these attitudes the real gifts of art and poetry and of all the great explanatory adventures are lost. They become mere "recreation"—"relaxation" from the proper business of life. In the second attitude, these gifts are corrupted: philosophy, science, history, poetry are merely recognized for the useful knowledge they may happen to supply and are thus assimilated into the so-called great business of human life—satisfying human wants.

The point at which this corruption is most likely to appear, and where it is most dangerous when it does appear, is in education. In these days when the satisfaction of human wants is taken to be the only important activity, those who devise our systems of education are apt to find a place for all that I have called "play" only if they can regard it as "work" of another sort. In this situation, generations may be deprived of that acquaintance with the activities of *Homo ludens* that was once thought to be the better part of education.

But, as it happens, we have a defense against this barbarity, an old way of thinking about these things that has not quite gone out of fashion. The word "school" we are apt to associate with "work," and often with acquiring the sort of useful knowledge and skill without which the "work" of satisfying wants is ineffective. But the word itself means exactly the opposite. It comes from a Greek word *skole,* which means "leisure" or "free time." A school was understood to be a place where one was introduced to those activities and attitudes towards the world that were *not* concerned with satisfying wants, where one was introduced to those activities of explanation and imagination that were "free" because they were pursued for their own sake and were emancipated from the limitations and anxieties of "work."

This way of thinking about education reappeared among the Romans in the expression *liberalia studia,* "liberal studies" or studies liberated from the concerns of practical doing, studies concerned with all the activities that belong to "play." There must, to be sure, be a place for learning how to use the resources of the world for the satisfaction of human wants. But we are fortunate if we are not encouraged to confuse the two quite different experiences of the world. And if we are allowed to pursue our "liberal" studies undistracted by what does not belong to them, we may thank the survival of an ancient tradition of education for our good fortune. F1

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Living with Numbers

John P. Sisk

After suffering through elementary arithmetic, geometry, algebra, and trigonometry it is easy to believe with the Pythagoreans that everything is number, or with St. Matthew that "the very hairs of your head are numbered." Inclined as they were to be mystic about their numbers, the Pythagoreans would have found Matthew as easy to adapt to their ontology as the announcement of Psalm 147 that the Lord not only "telleth the number of the stars" but "calleth them by name." We are as immersed in our intricately numbered cosmos as is a fish in its water. The fish, of course, does not have to suffer the awareness of the alienating disjunction between itself and its cosmos, which would be the case if it had the capacity to do grade school arithmetic.

The Pythagoreans had no way of determining the number of hairs on one's head, to say nothing of one's blood pressure, but they surely would have agreed with Winston Smith in Orwell's *1984* that "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two equals four." They had that faith in the wonderfully ordered multiplicity of the cosmos that we find in those poets who have not yet succumbed to a more relativistic mathematics. Thus Wordsworth in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" sees beside a lake ten thousand golden daffodils and compares them to "the stars that shine / And twinkle on the milky way."

But then we might expect the poet to be at home with numbers if we remember the traditional association of the art of poetry with numbers in the sense of the structured and melodious flow of stressed and unstressed syllables. When poetry was referred to as numbers it was still easy for poets and their readers to believe that the grand model for the successful poem was the universe itself. When Wordsworth associates the fluttering and dancing of ten thousand daffodils with the twinkling of implied thousands of stars in the milky way, one set of numbers repeats and reinforces the other. The important thing is not the accuracy of the count but the fact that daffodils and stars are countably there in a cosmos that supports the poet's perception of a true relationship between them, and his expectation that when the conditions are right the experience will recur. In Wordsworth's poem there is no threat in the big numbers, as in another context there might very well be. This is because this reference is less to sheer numbers than to admirable variety.

I suspect that the number-minded Pythagoreans could have accommodated themselves to Wordsworth's phenomenology but not to that of their fellow Greek, Diogenes. The latter had been run out of his native Sinope because as a devaluator of the currency he had shown a lack of respect for the economic numbering system upon which a community depends for its social and economic well-being. Established in his tub at Athens, he brought together in his life and writings the cynic and skeptic attitudes that subsequently made him a hero for many of those who experience life not as a pleasant and purposefully ordered variety but as sheer numbers in a world that is too much with them. He was a true minimalist for whom the cosmos was afflicted by too much of everything, especially people; indeed, he anticipated Sartre's definition of hell as other people.

Diogenes also anticipated those holy reductionists about whom Helen Waddell writes so memorably in *The Desert Fathers*. "These men, by the exaggeration of their lives," she says of the North African ascetics, "stamped infinity on the imagination of the West." They devaluated the clock time of the abstractly numbered cosmos by contrasting it with the unity and simplicity of eternity. Paradoxically, Waddell says, they ended up giving time unplumbed depths. One might say too that they helped to preserve an episteme in which centuries later William Blake in his

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"Auguries of Innocence" could aspire

> To see a world in a grain of sand
> And a heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
> And eternity in an hour.

Nevertheless, the Fathers also helped to institutionalize that uneasiness in the presence of the abundant variety of God's universe that has always nagged at the Christian West. If they had learned to see heaven in a wild flower (the best of them could) they would have been less likely to fall (as a few of them did) into the hands of the Gnostics for whom all grains of sand and all wild flowers were part of the numbers racket of the evil Demiurge.

But even for Wordsworth the wonderfully various world of the golden daffodils that was so compatible with the magic of poetic numbers had its menacing and defining contrast: the City with its hordes of other people becoming ever more dependent on and alienated by nature-abusing technology, attention-distracting media, and freak-show entertainment. Progressively throughout the speeded-up nineteenth century the need to feel meaningfully at home in the cosmos is threatened by the sheer numbers that have resulted from the effort to understand that cosmos and exploit its energies. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth has not lost his connections with the ten thousand golden daffodils, but his encounter in Book Seven with Bartholomew Fair at Smithfield gives him a grimly countering image of the blank confusion that "the mighty City is herself, / To thousands upon thousands of her sons." There are moments when he sounds as certain as any Desert Father that the world, as he puts it in one of his best sonnets, "is too much with us."

A bit later in "Dover Beach" Matthew Arnold has not given up hope that literature would do for him the ordering work that religious faith had once done. For Arnold the world which seems "To lie before us like a land of dreams, / So various, so beautiful, so new," is actually "swept with alarms of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night." He could be speaking for us a century later when, thanks to advances in physics, geology, astronomy, biology, and transportation, Wordsworth's ten thousand is no longer a very big number—whether we are thinking about the milky way, our genetic makeup, the 95,000 miles of fiber-optic cable laid along the information superhighway, or the national debt.

Before Arnold's century was over, Darwin showed that within the apparently hit-and-miss abundance of life a purposeful structural force was at work. To some this was a benign force rich with the expectation that in due time science might relieve humans of the burden of sheer numbers. Secular optimists were quick to see a grand unifying theory in the conjunction of Marx and Darwin. Marx, in fact, would have dedicated the first volume of *Capital* to Darwin if the latter had permitted him to. Tennyson, however, was one of those for whom Darwin had revealed not the sweet and ordered variety of nature but its wasteful profusion. So in "In Memoriam" he is appalled at a nature that is "So careful of the type" and yet "So careless of the single life . . . that of fifty seeds / She often brings but one to bear." The irony (and perhaps it was some comfort to him) is that he was able to contrast the disorder of evolution with the neat quatrains of his poetic numbers. John Stuart Mill, who credited Wordsworth's poetry with reclaiming him from a world of sheer numbers, might have appreciated that irony.

The fifty-to-one odds against the single life that appalled Tennyson can seem generous enough now. Suppose he had to live with the knowledge that the sperm that impregnates the ovum is the lone survivor among the 400 million that were ejaculated with it. Biologists have good reason to believe that the wasteful disproportion between the winner and the losers is a life-fostering one. When we factor in the knowledge that the existence of the winner's parents was determined by the same statistics, the odds against any particular single life's appearance in the cosmos are as astronomic as the prevention of its appearance by abortion is appalling.

God, speaking to Moses from the burning bush, can identify Himself as "I am who am." All Moses and the mortal rest of us can say is: "Thanks to You, I am only by the skin of my teeth." Even Nietzsche, whose habit before madness claimed him was to speak as if from a burning bush, had to *become* what he was, whereas God is beyond becoming. No doubt it is this sense of the utter precariousness of the single life that prompts us to celebrate the miracle of its improbable appearance. But at the same time our sense of the improbability of its appearance can only reinforce our creaturely apprehension that in the lottery of life the odds are enormously against us. Perhaps his hypersensitivity to the hazards of existence was an important factor in Calvin's doctrine of salvation through unearned and irresistible grace. What better way to counter the despair of the single life's sense of powerless anonymity?

Those among its eleven million users who have not already found in Prozac a relief from the pains of being mere numbers in the cosmos might find a more spectacular anodyne where Walt Whitman found it. In "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" the poet, becoming sick and tired of the scientist's charts and diagrams, "wander'd off by myself, In the mystical moist night air, and from time to time, / Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars." The stars did for him what they did for Kant, who claimed to be moved to inexpressible awe by two things: the starry sky above and the moral law within. At these moments Whitman and Kant are on the side of the astrologer, who

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assures his or her believers that the single life is a matter of benevolent concern to the apparently inscrutable heavens. Even the most obdurate ascetic minimalist is not likely to complain about the number and remoteness of the stars when their dazzling presence aloft makes him forget that there is no safety in numbers.

Still there are those for whom such cosmic optimism does not begin to alleviate the cosmic anxieties aroused by the overawing big numbers with which the Hubble telescope is involved. Built at a cost of $1.5 billion (its repairs cost another $690 million), it was expected to see galaxies beginning to form ten billion light years away and gather information about quasars, black holes, and the swirling storms of Jupiter. Perhaps in time it will even locate the astral abode of those pagan Goddesses who have lately been reported to be doing more for their devotees than Christian Guardian Angels ever did.

Michael Foucault would have been less interested in the possibility that the Hubble might someday locate heaven out there in the wide blue yonder than in the fact that it was a cosmic panopticon. The panopticon he would have had in mind, to judge from his *Discipline and Punish*, was the one planned by the utilitarian Jeremy Bentham, whose positivist hopes for a better world were grounded on the conviction that the true measure of human happiness was the greatest good for the greatest number. Bentham expected to achieve this condition (no computers being available) by way of a "felicific calculus" that would balance pains with pleasures. His panopticon, a necessary but never-realized part of his plans for prison reform, would have made it possible for a single but invisible observer, using a series of reflectors, to keep all prisoners under surveillance at all times for the good of themselves and society.

The totalitarian state, being panoptic in its bones, is threatened by nothing more than the single life's impulse to privacy. This is the threat that impels Orwell's Big Brother to imprison Ingsoc within a censoring virtual reality and control it from his panoptic perspective. At the same time he has to be an atheist lest his autonomy be preempted by God's panoptic view. No doubt it was the same fear that made it necessary for Nietzsche to kill off God. How could he ever be everything he could be in the Hubble-like surveillance of that eye in the sky?

Unfortunately there remains the Hubble effect: the more he can see, the greater the epistemological burden for the controller and the greater the odds for the controlled single life that the sweet variety of the cosmos will become sheer and undifferentiated numbers.

Thoreau, our own Desert Father, was no less bothered than Wordsworth by the Hubble effect in the post-Enlightenment world. In *Walden*, in, appropriately, the chapter on economy, he is fascinated by the "busk" as it is practiced by certain savage nations. A busking is an act of purification in which the old, the excessive, the worn out, and the discredited are piled up in a public square and burned in anticipation of a new and refreshed life. For Thoreau the busk is a ritual way of living with the threat of big numbers—those numbers he saw menacingly at work in the railroad, the telegraph and the cable. "I say," he advises, "let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen and keep your accounts on your thumb nail." His good luck was that he did not have to compete with the digital computer's thousand or so arithmetical operations per second. No doubt economic minimalists like Diogenes and St. Paul the Hermit would have agreed: life in the Egyptian desert or in an Athenian tub is itself a busking life committed to the paradox that less is more. Humans spend a great deal of time, energy, and money on such buskings as revolutions, insurrections, wars to end war, jihads, ethnic cleansings, and holocausts. Indeed, number-reducing buskers like Savonarola, Genghis Khan, Chairman Mao, Stalin, and Hitler might have contended that they were only imitating nature in its tough-minded willingness to sacrifice 400 million sperm in the interest of an authentic single life.

The extent to which such buskings are themselves contaminated by a hatred of life in all its various and burdensome abundance—not simply as it may be at a particular place and time but everywhere and all the time—is the theme of Hawthorne's story "Earth's Holocaust." Here aroused and perfectionist reformers, seeing the wide world "overburdened with an accumulation of worn-out trumpery . . . have determined to rid themselves of it by a general bonfire." This busking takes place on a broad western prairie where everything that for better or worse is involved with the ongoing business of civilization is thrown into the flames—everything, that is, except the human heart, which, as a sardonic observer notes, is quite capable of bringing back the old defective world. The joyous orgy suggests that the buskers are really motivated by a Gnostic desire to destroy the evil and number-infatuated Demiurge that created the obscene and cluttered mess of the world to begin with. Hawthorne observes this folly with the same irony that makes his later *Blithedale Romance* such a memorable depiction of American millennialism. And certainly his buskers deserve high marks for the Thoreauean simplicity of their procrustean program. As for Thoreau himself, one can well imagine how he might have reacted had he read Robert D. Kaplan's article "The Coming Anarchy" in the February 1994 *Atlantic*, with its prediction that in the next half century "the earth's population will soar from 5.5 billion to more than nine billion." Under such circumstances the celibate Thoreau, in whose ascetic arithmetic subtraction took priority over

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addition and multiplication, could expect about as much privacy at Walden as at the Superbowl.

Bentham too was an ardent busker. The felicific calculus by which he hoped to determine the greatest good for the greatest number would have to be purged of those fictitious entities of language known as poetry. "All poetry," he said, "is misrepresentation," which meant that it was a prime subject for epistemological economy in an already badly overcrowded universe. He needed to dispose of poetry for the same reason that Lenin needed to dispose of religion, there being no place for it in the Marxian felicific calculus.

Thanks to the time-bound nature of the human condition, theorizing and busking are complementary activities. If you are possessed by the theoretic worldview of the Abbot Paul, your despising of the world will in effect be a busking of it, just as your view of it will be restrictively panoptic. In fact, the desert in our culture has always been available as a powerful model of a busked state of affairs in contrast with fragmented city-based culture. In the minimalized utopia of the desert the simplest arithmetic is enough; there, you can keep your accounts on your thumbnail.

What Diogenes thought about poetry is not recorded but his combination of cynicism and skepticism makes it likely that he would have agreed with Bentham. Now we see the same reductive combination at work in some of our most absolutist postmodernists. If with their rhetorical sophistries they can induce enough people to believe that poems are only self-referential and rife with self-engendered paradoxes, that poetry-making selves are only fictions, then they will surely reduce the number of selves in the world—and God knows how much trouble is caused in the world by those who take themselves seriously as selves. If at the same time the postmodernists can induce us to moderate our passion for certainty, then much that we currently value as life-enhancing variety will be seen as disposable sideshow. The result could be a grand therapeutic busking that will save us from the embarrassments we are doomed to when we are tempted by our naive simplicities to go lusting after the stars.

We can see in Diogenes the always attractive image of the philosopher as a man whose panoptic and unifying view of past, present, and future makes him immune to the surprises that afflict the mortal rest of us. Surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, is the consequence of variety and contrast; without them there is only the sheer numerosity of being, the Hubble effect at its epistemological worst when unity is the result of a censoring that leaves one blind to all distinctions.

No doubt the need to believe in the possibility of invulnerability to surprise leads us to see such invulnerability where it does not exist—in Thoreau, for instance, whose encounter with the cosmos, for all his ascetic denials, turned out to be one surprising development after another.

In any event, the poet's way of knowing is surprise-dependent, and when the poet is beyond surprise, having perhaps through an atrophy of powers or a loss of nerve learned how to practice the comforts of self-repetition, he is poet no more. This is not the way it was with Wordsworth when in his lonely wandering he saw in a single glance those ten thousand golden daffodils in an ontological relationship with the twinkling stars of the milky way and knew instantly that the surprise of it would stand against those inevitable moments when the variety of his world, having shown itself as less than sweet, was only numbers without end. FT

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The Eclipse of Fatherhood

Gilbert Meilaender

FATHERLESS AMERICA: CONFRONTING OUR MOST URGENT SOCIAL PROBLEM. By DAVID BLANKENHORN. *Basic Books. 328 pp. $23.*

Suppose we accept for the moment a widespread depiction of how our society has systematically oppressed women. It has connected the biological fact that women give birth with the cultural task of childrearing, assigning by far the larger share of that task to women because of the biological "accident" that they are the birthgivers. The woman has already "borne" the child; yet, we have assumed that she must also be chiefly responsible for that child's nurture. Men, by contrast, beget but do not give birth. Biologically, therefore, the link between begetting and nurturing is more attenuated for men than for woman. Our culture has—unjustly—allowed that biological fact to shape the way it apportions the tasks of childrearing, thereby depriving women of full and equal participation in the many realms of life outside the home (the professions, the arts, business, politics, etc.).

How should we respond to such a standard depiction? Scratch anyone who has taken the right courses at college, and he or she is likely to respond that the injustice of this situation can be rectified only if we set ourselves as a culture against biology. We must overcome the male's tendency to opt out of childrearing by emphasizing that those who beget but do not bear are equally responsible for nurturing their children. That task of nurturing, maternal work, is work that men and women are equally obliged to undertake. Men need, in effect, to become more like women, and, however millennia of biological evolution may have shaped us, our culture should set itself against the male as we know him. This will, in effect, free women for fulfillment outside the home, and, happily, it will be better for men as well—encouraging them to be more nurturing, less aggressive and competitive, less focused on earning a living, less . . . well, less masculine and paternal.

In *Fatherless America*, a work of cultural criticism of a very high order, David Blankenhorn subjects this now deeply entrenched understanding to thoroughgoing scrutiny. His approach is shaped by a distinctive starting point: what is good for children. It turns out that one of the things that is very good indeed for children is to have a father. Not just another human being who provides an additional set of hands with which to carry out what is understood as essentially maternal—or just human—work, but a father. Among other things, this book is a slashing attack on the emphasis upon self-fulfillment exalted by those who propose androgyny as the solution to the standard depiction of the oppression of women. In Blankenhorn's words, the androgynous ideal "constitutes the most radical conception of expressive individualism that a society can imagine. It is the belief, quite simply, that human completion is a solo act." Putting the welfare of children first leads Blankenhorn to conclude, in contrast, that the task of childrearing requires "mutual dependency, grounded in the realities of gender complementarity." A society unable to measure up to the requirements of the task is a society whose future is endangered—because its children are endangered.

A profound issue lurks just a little beneath the surface of Blankenhorn's discussion. Though the "realities" that Blankenhorn wants us to take into account, accommodate, and affirm are biological realities about men and women, he himself does not want us simply to take our moral norms directly from biology. Quite in conformity with the standard depiction of our situation, he too sees men's sexuality as much more "hit-and-run" than women's. He too believes—and very helpfully uses the state-of-nature political philosophers to argue—that the socialization of males into fatherhood is a necessary "precondition for the rise of successful human societies." In his analysis, too, there is something a little suspect about the male.

We may therefore legitimately wonder whether he makes his peace too quickly with masculine, paternal tendencies. Since he himself wants to socialize those tendencies and transform the male into a more nurturing fellow, since he wants a "cultural script" for fathers that is not simply a transliteration of biological fact, why not do it more thoroughly? Why not do it in the way the standard depiction recommends? His argument is, I think, systematically ambiguous on this point. At times the androgynous ideal seems simply to be one that fails because it does not reckon with what men are like. Why not, then, just work harder to change what men are like, to make them less masculine and paternal? Because at other times the standard depiction seems to be *normatively* mis-

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taken, an inadequate depiction of our humanity at its highest and best. This problem needs some sorting out, but I set it aside for the moment in order to outline the basic themes of Blankenhorn's case.

Everyone knows, if only because we have heard it repeated regularly, that an increasing number of homes in our society have no father in them. And almost everyone now seems to grant that this situation is bad (even if such an admission came a little too late to help Dan Quayle). But *Fatherless America* would not have to be as big a book as it is, and it would not be as important a book as it is, were that its only point. For Blankenhorn, the problem we face goes far deeper. It is not simply the loss of fathers, but the loss of the idea of fatherhood and of our belief in the importance of fathers. We no longer have a distinctive "cultural script" for fatherhood. When I become a father, what have I become? What am I to do in that paternal role? How should it alter my life and habits? A society in which there are no culturally given answers to such questions is one that may experience grave difficulty drawing men into the role of fatherhood and its accompanying tasks and burdens.

In short, our cultural script for fathers is that they are unnecessary. "Today's expert story of fatherhood largely assumes that fatherhood is superfluous." Indeed, since we identify a distinctive paternal role with the "Old Father," who was distanced and authoritarian, we may even suppose that fathers are part of our problem. Blankenhorn is quite willing to grant that, in a sense, they are. "Certainly this combustible contradiction inherent within fatherhood—closeness partly through distance, affection partly through coercion—helps explain why fatherhood constitutes such a problematic contrivance in human societies." Given the flaws of the Old Father, and the difficulty we have reconciling ourselves to him, many scholars have concluded that we may be better off without him. They worry less about the absence of a good father than about the presence of a bad one. Blankenhorn is quite convincing in arguing that, while it is true that having a father sometimes fosters anger, having no father at all fosters much greater anger. It leads to "mistrust, violence, nihilism." A violent society results not from the bad example of fathers who abuse their power; it results from fatherlessness.

That many of us have not matured beyond the desire to slay the father is cause for concern, but Blankenhorn is not interested in defending every aspect of the Old Father. What he does seek to accomplish—and what he achieves with devastating effect—is debunking the ideal of the New Father so often offered as a replacement for the Old. The New Father is to be a deeply involved parent and companion, nurturing his children, freely expressing emotion, eager to move beyond gender stereotypes, more interested in being emotionally available than in being a good provider for his family. He is likely to see family and work as conflicting domains. Time spent at work is not time spent in service of his family and its needs; it is time that conflicts with his role in the family. Whereas for the Old Father work was a way of being committed to his family—"proximity through distance"—the New Father sees only competition between the demands of work and family. Precisely such a tension has, of course, led to a good bit of role strain for women in recent decades. "Yet this typically maternal ambivalence and stress about employment are exactly what the New Father model prescribes for men. The New Father's plea is: role strain for me, too."

Blankenhorn is right to note that it is peculiar to find a society downplaying the father's role as "provider" while simultaneously criticizing fathers for failing to support their children. Moreover, he sees the provider role as peculiarly suited to the male.

> Paternal attachment to breadwinning is neither arbitrary nor anachronistic. Historically and currently, the breadwinner role matches quite well with core aspects of masculine identity. Especially compared to other parental activities, breadwinning is objective, rule-oriented, and easily measurable. It is an instrumental, goal-driven activity in which success derives, at least in part, from aggression. Most important, the provider role permits men to serve their families through competition with other men. In this sense, the ideal of paternal breadwinning encultures male aggression by directing it toward a prosocial purpose.

That passage is an instance of Blankenhorn's tendency to read a norm directly off biological and anthropological evidence, and I think more is needed than this to construct a normative argument. But there is more. It flows from Blankenhorn's fundamental commitment to the wellbeing of children. In attacking distinctive parental roles for husbands and wives, advocates of the New Father may serve the interests of autonomous adults in search of self-fulfillment, but they oppose precisely what children need. Compared to the offspring of other animal species, the human child is dependent on parental care for a comparatively long period of time. During that period which David Gutmann has termed the "parental emergency"—"the needs of the child compel mothers and fathers to specialize in their labor and to adopt gender-based parental roles." That is an argument that takes its start from a certain biological fact but is also based upon a prior normative commitment—the wellbeing of children as central to human society.

Thus, although Blankenhorn can applaud certain features of the New Father model—its emphasis upon paternal tenderness, for example—he argues

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that it cannot provide a satisfactory cultural script for fathers. Advocates of the New Father are often also eager to claim that single-parent (usually single-mother) families are fine, which means that fathers—as men who fill a distinctive cultural and familial role—are superfluous and unnecessary. Another person, another set of hands, is always helpful. Lacking that extra set of hands can sometimes be harmful. But lacking a father is not in itself harmful.

> At bottom, the New Father idea presupposes the larger thesis that fatherhood is superfluous. In this respect, the New Father is indistinguishable from the Unnecessary Father. In our current cultural discourse, the two are usually understood as opposites; one good, one bad. But in this larger sense, they are interchangeable characters in a single cultural narrative.

These three—the Unnecessary Father, the Old Father, and the New Father—are the central characters in the cultural script for fatherhood currently dominant in our society (or, at least, in its opinion-making wings). There are also five more minor roles into which fathers are placed: Deadbeat Dad, Visiting Father, Sperm Father, Stepfather, and Nearby Guy. These may be minor roles, but Blankenhorn's discussion of them is very perceptive and illuminating. Here I discuss only the first two, leaving the reader some pleasures to discover.

Everyone seems to agree that the Deadbeat Dad is a bad father, a judgment from which Blankenhorn does not dissent. But why is he bad? Blankenhorn's target is the sort of view expressed by Andrew J. Cherlin of Johns Hopkins University, who told the U.S. House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families that "the major problem the children have in a single-parent family is not the lack of a male image, but rather the lack of a male income." The chief problem, in other words, is not that the Deadbeat Dad has abandoned his children; it is that he does not pay. Ironies abound here. The New Father is encouraged to think of himself less as a provider; yet, the Deadbeat Dad is cast in essentially that role. Thus, the Deadbeat Dad also testifies to our belief that fathers—as men playing distinctive roles in families—are superfluous.

One might object, of course, and argue that such criticism is a little unfair. Obviously, one might say, we would prefer that fathers not abandon their children. But common sense suggests that, if they do, it will be better for the children if they pay child support. On Blankenhorn's own principles, that ought to be obvious. It turns out, however, not to be so obvious—and for a reason that is very important to the entire argument of this book. Particularly for the increasingly large number of Deadbeat Dads who never were married to the mothers of their children, our culture sends contradictory signals. We devise social policies that encourage unwed fatherhood, and we become outraged if anyone suggests that a family without a father might be deficient as a family—in short, we send the message that fathers aren't all that important—and then we want to crack down on Deadbeat Dads, insisting that it is very important that they accept responsibility for their children. We cannot articulate a believable moral ideal; for to hold up such an ideal as normative is understood as demeaning those who have failed to achieve it. Toward them we must be understanding, compassionate, and empowering—without ever reflecting on how this undercuts our ability to articulate a moral norm credibly.

This, Blankenhorn suggests, implies a lack of moral seriousness. And he is right. He notes that many of those classified as Deadbeat Dads do not really think of themselves as that, since they have taken seriously what our culture has been telling them about the superfluity of fatherhood. "Their reasoning may be sad, but at least it is consistent. They do not think of themselves as deadbeats precisely because they do not think of themselves as dads. These guys never signed on to anything. They never agreed to play by any fatherhood role. . . . By what reasonable principle do they owe anybody anything?"

We should note in passing that this is one place where the powerful cultural criticism of this book suggests more than its author is willing to develop. Throughout, Blankenhorn is careful to focus his attention simply on fatherlessness, which he, perhaps rightly, regards as our most urgent domestic problem. Seeking allies wherever he may find them, he steadfastly avoids being drawn into discussions of related questions. Yet these cultural issues are often of a piece, and Blankenhorn's discussion of Deadbeat Dads cannot be insulated from the issue of abortion, a topic he everywhere avoids. When in *Roe v. Wade* the Supreme Court unearthed a right of privacy broad enough to encompass the right to an abortion, it permitted that right to be limited by only two opposing state interests, if and when they are relevant and compelling: the state's interest in protecting maternal health and life, and the state's interest in protecting potential life. Had the Court added a third possibly compelling state interest for which there is precedent in our jurisprudence—an interest in preserving the family bond—its concept of a right of privacy might have been different. But in *Roe v. Wade* it ratified the idea that bodily acts in themselves do not constitute personal or moral commitments of the self. One becomes a mother only if one explicitly consents to become a mother. Deadbeat Dads think, not altogether unreasonably, that they should benefit from similar logic. This is an issue to which Blankenhorn's argument inevitably drives us, however much he may himself avoid it.

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If the Deadbeat Dad is clearly a bad guy in our current discourse, the Visiting Father is not. His is a rather effete role, however—"fatherhood lite" as Blankenhorn so nicely puts it—and it is not surprising that many men who are cast in that role resent it. The Visiting Father, who maintains some sort of presence in the life of his children after divorce, is finally another example of the Unnecessary Father. He is seen as harmless, perhaps mildly helpful; he "pays child support and does not make trouble." Visiting Fathers try to sustain a certain emotional bond with their children, but, Blankenhorn argues quite persuasively, that bond is not fatherhood. "When it becomes an emotion, detached from daily life and stripped of any empowering context, it is no longer fatherhood. It is an adult sentiment, and it amounts to very little for a child to count on." More strongly still: "Visitation unfathers men. This phenomenon gradually strangles the father-child relationship."

There is much in the book's discussion of the Visiting Father that is worthy of attention; indeed, it may be the single strongest chapter in the book. I focus here only on its astute dissection of our culture's attempt to help the Visiting Father (and the children whom he visits) through the idea of "better divorce." Blankenhorn's analysis of the movie *Mrs. Doubtfire* is itself almost worth the price of the book. The movie's explicitly ideological aim is "to affirm the possibility of better divorce," a possibility whose realization depends on a father who, in order to become a good Visiting Father, must transcend masculinity and become a woman.

Lacking any better idea about how to deal with the prevalence of divorce in our society, we endorse the idea of a better—more amicable, cooperative, and communicative—divorce. Again, it seems at first like an idea that common sense ought to endorse; yet, it proves to be an idea that makes it difficult to sustain a normative understanding of what marriage and family should be. We are exhorted to eliminate the stigma of the broken home, to provide children with positive and empowering images of the unfortunate "family" circumstances in which they find themselves. What we are endorsing, however, is love without structure, feeling without body—as if divorce will be no problem so long as we do it right.

The "better" a divorce looks, Blankenhorn notes, the more it will resemble a marriage. "Living near each other. Cooperating. Communicating. Sharing the joys and responsibilities of parenthood. Making sacrifices and compromises for the sake of family. Reproducing for children what exists in intact families. It all begins to sound like a good-enough marriage, minus the sex." Minus, that is, the body—minus the full meeting of those whose very differences are complementary, but who now run from each other. We deceive ourselves and "indulge in comforting fantasy" if we suppose that we can in this way retain for children the true sense of what it means to belong to a family. Rather, the "solution" of "better divorce" is really "a sign of our unwillingness to confront the problem" that we have become a "divorce culture," unable or unwilling to raise our normative standards—deceived into supposing that we can find even in divorce a good way to seek the wellbeing of our children.

This book is, I have said, cultural criticism of a very high order. Moreover, in not only the direction but also the directness of its argument, it is a courageous book. But does it go beyond criticism? Does it point us toward any superior "cultural script" for fatherhood? In his concluding two chapters Blankenhorn first depicts an ideal of fatherhood to which we should aspire—what he calls the "good family man"—and then offers twelve proposals as beginning steps toward promoting that ideal.

The Good Family Man wields authority in the home, believes that his fatherhood is necessary and important, seeks to provide for his family. Is this the Old Father redivivus? No, Blankenhorn assures us, for the Good Family Man "knows that his wife also wields authority. He knows that her work in the family, while not identical to his, is equally important and also irreplaceable. He aspires to the ideals of paternal tenderness and companionate marriage. He believes that men who lead are men who serve." I suspect that some Old Fathers might well have affirmed most or all of those tenets, but let us grant that the Good Family Man is different from the Old Father. What are his peculiarly paternal functions? They are to provide, to protect, to nurture, and to sponsor.

He seeks to provide for his family, explicitly viewing his work in instrumental terms. Earning a living does not simply take him away from his family. More fundamentally, it unites him with his family as he uses his work to serve the family's welfare. In a world saturated with the idea that work is the sphere of self-fulfillment, it is refreshing to watch Blankenhorn recapture what is in fact an old idea: that work is less a place to realize ourselves than a place to serve the needs of others, among whom are the members of one's family.

Nevertheless, in his understandable polemic against the view that work separates a father from his family, Blankenhorn may underplay the possible conflict between demands of work and family. Even if I understand my work as breadwinning in the service of my family, that work turns out to make its own requirements and have its own demands. It serves the needs of others besides my family and obligates me to those others. I am therefore somewhat reluctant to endorse wholeheartedly the formulation Blankenhorn offers at the outset as a one-sentence distillation of the book: "A good society celebrates the ideal of the man who puts his family first." First? Ahead of his own desire for fulfillment, to be sure, and that is no doubt chiefly what Blankenhorn has in mind. But,

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first? We need here a little more of the poet's spirit: "I could not love thee, dear, so much, Lov'd I not honour more."

There may, that is, be obligations and callings even more compelling (at certain moments) than that of the good family man. We can, I think, say this without in any way denigrating the immense significance of the ideal Blankenhorn sets forth; for a society of would-be autonomous individuals intent on fulfilling themselves will probably be as deaf to other claims as to those of fatherhood. Even fatherhood itself, as a necessary cultural ideal, may need to be grounded in something that transcends the biological and anthropological "givens" of human development and the social necessities of healthy societies. As a *normative* role that both attracts and compels us, fatherhood may need to mirror something that transcends such givens—a Father whose glory is to serve the child, even if the child slay him.

In addition to providing, the Good Family Man protects, nurtures, and sponsors. As protector, he seeks to help his children learn how to navigate their way amid the dangers of social life. As nurturer, he spends time, together with his wife, in caring for the children and the household. As sponsor—the "heart of fatherhood"—he seeks to pass on to his children a valued way of life, showing them what sort of persons they are to be and how they are to live. Mothers also provide such sponsorship, of course, but mothers and fathers will do it, Blankenhorn suggests, in ways that are specifically maternal and paternal respectively. A father's sponsorship may be more expectant and demanding, focusing especially on "preparation for the future and on children's success in the larger society." Still more, a father's love will be significantly more conditional than a mother's—dependent on having expectations met. Here again, I question whether this given of the masculine psyche is one with which we must simply make our peace. Should not the norm of fatherhood—instructed once again perhaps by the example of a transcendent Father—be shaped by an *un*conditional love that goes beyond what is given in the natural paternal impulse?

Most readers, I suspect, will be just a little disappointed by the policy proposals of the final chapter. Perhaps that is inevitable, given the scope of the book's critique. Most of the proposals are surely sensible, though I am not much drawn to the request that every man in our society pledge himself to effective fatherhood. Pledges make sense only within ritual contexts surrounded by a shared web of belief, and the largely unanswered question of this book is whether the web in our society has been irreparably torn. Nor am I persuaded that we would be helped much by statements supporting marriage from an interfaith council of religious leaders, or by encouragement to clergy from such a council to commit themselves to programs of marital preparation and enrichment. It would be far more effective if clergy simply declined to continue the routine practice of conducting marriage rites—with few or no questions asked—for those who have been previously divorced. But that, of course, may seem less compassionate, and we are once again led to ponder how we can establish practices that are compassionate but do not undercut the norms we seek to uphold.

Much more interesting is Blankenhorn's recommendation that public officials across the nation follow the example of the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners in Minnesota. That Board drafted a vision statement which called upon its citizenry "to move toward a community 'where healthy family structure is nurtured and fewer children are born out of wedlock.'" It should surprise no one that the Commissioners received enormous criticism for their proposal. The moral of the story, in Blankenhorn's words, is that "if you want to say something controversial, say that every child deserves a father and that unwed childbearing is wrong."

David Blankenhorn has said that and more with vigor and grace in this important book. We are all in his debt. FT

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Books In Review

The Accursed One

Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil. By Bernard McGinn. *Harper Collins. 369 pp. $32.50.*

Reviewed by **Walter Sundberg**

"You have heard," writes St. John in his epistles, "that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour." Who is Antichrist? He (or they) comes out of the community of faith but is not part of it. His opposition to God is doctrinal: he denies "the Father and the Son"; he refuses to "confess Jesus"; he will "not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh."

These few references are all that we have in the New Testament. Despite this, Antichrist has captured the imagination of Christians across the centuries and engendered a disturbing, sometimes frightening tradition. The reasons for the Christian fascination are not hard to find. The word "Antichrist" itself is so compelling that were there only one verse in the New Testament that used it, the commentators across the centuries would still have written enormous commentaries on that verse. That Antichrist has to do with the volatile mixture of the last times and the denial of Christ only adds to his allure. He represents all that is obscure, conspiratorial, chaotic, and evil in the Bible.

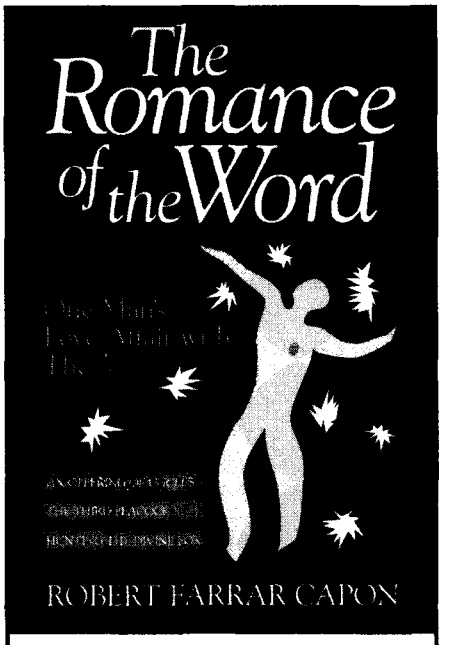
Among his companions from the scriptures are the *pseudochristoi* who, Christ says, will come "in my name" and will "lead you astray"—"the lawless one" (2 Thessalonians 2:10) who, by the power of Satan, will impress the faithful with false signs and wonders, offering "a strong delusion" to tempt "those who are perishing"; "Gog and Magog" who, under Satan's command, will gather the nations for the final battle with Christ (Revelation 20:2-10); the "beasts" of Revelation (16, 17, 19) that harken back to the "beasts" of Daniel (7); "the sons of Belial" (Deuteronomy 13:13 and passim) who are "base" or "worthless," who practice idolatry, drunkenness, disrespect, evil speech, who are "empty men" (2 Chronicles 13:7); and the conspiring nations and rulers who take counsel against the Lord (Psalms 2:1-3).

In the history of the Church, Antichrist has been variously identified with the spirit of heresy (Polycarp), the Roman empire (Irenaeus), the resurrected Nero (Chrysostom), and the Muslim, Saracen, Turk, or Jew. The Waldensians and Spiritual Franciscans identified him with the failed papacy (as did Wyclif, Hus, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and Cranmer). Roman Catholics, loyal to the Pope, returned the favor and had their own list of Protestant Antichrists, beginning with Luther. In modernity, political figures from Napoleon to Saddam Hussein have been tagged with the infamous title.

Bernard McGinn, Professor of the History of Christianity at the University of Chicago Divinity School and President of the American Society of Church History, announces at the beginning of his careful, detailed book that he wishes to take Antichrist "seriously but not literally." By the time he is done, he has covered everything from the rise of Jewish apocalypticism to Roman Polanski's 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby* and the *Omen* trilogy from the 1970s. He concludes by quoting Denis the Carthusian: "Have we not worn ourselves out with that accursed Antichrist?"

McGinn's answer appears to be "yes." Except for the vulgar allegiance of what McGinn calls "Fundamentalist Christians," "the legend" of Antichrist no longer captures the imagination: "Most believing Christians seem puzzled, even slightly embarrassed by Antichrist, especially given the legend's use in fostering hatred and oppression of groups."

Walter Sundberg *is Professor of Church History at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.*



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While it is possible to reappropriate symbols like Antichrist from the past, it is, says McGinn, a tricky business. He goes about it gingerly by first calling upon Jung's reflections on the shadow side of reality. Evil is part of the archetypal forms present to the individual and collective self. It is "psychologically unwise" to ignore entirely what Antichrist represents as the counterpart to the good symbol of the Christ. McGinn next reminds the reader of the persistence of the apocalyptic mentality in the late twentieth century. This mentality is indicative of "the necessity of living in expectation of the future," both in hope and in fear. Antichrist is important insofar as he is a window on to the apocalyptic worldview. These efforts of McGinn to make Antichrist relevant are decidedly modest, even half-hearted; they cover only seven pages out of 280 pages of text.

In *Antichrist*, McGinn practices historical criticism in the classic mode of the Enlightenment. Rational, scientific investigation of texts is employed to establish the meaning of the topic at hand. The interpreter acts as an objective outsider who, while assiduously practicing disinterested awareness, uncovers the facts and pronounces final judgment. The subject-matter under investigation, whatever it is, is put in its place. The interpreter is superior to his subject because he exercises intellectual control.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT method is powerful. *Antichrist* is a gold mine of research, enhanced by the occasional attractive illustration from the history of Christian art and pamphleteering. But its ultimate effect is to make the reader dispense with Antichrist as one of those portions of the scriptural witness whose time is past. The unmistakable conclusion of McGinn's book is that Antichrist is dead—or he should be.

To dispense with Antichrist, however, would be a tragic mistake. In his otherwise scrupulous survey of sources, McGinn neglects that gifted generation of dogmaticians who came to maturity in Europe during the two decades between the world wars: Paul Althaus, Hermann Diem, Emil Brunner, Heinrich Vogel, Edmund Schlink, and the Roman Catholic Michael Schmaus—all of whom have written grippingly of Antichrist as a revealed truth that speaks to our age.

Their argument is as follows: Christianity has been an essential force in the emergence of modernity. Christian faith challenged the pessimism and resignation of ancient culture and unleashed new possibilities for political organization, cultural expression, scientific and technical exploration, and the emergence of the individual. These possibilities resulted from the sacred fact that faith confesses: Christ frees humanity from the law and all the burdens of oppressive, external authorities. The freedom of the gospel is so powerful that it extends even to those who do not call upon the name of Christ. And yet, without Christ, the divine gift of freedom is misused to rebel against God and reject his law. This misuse of the gift of freedom is the realm of the Antichrist. It permeates the history of post-Classical Western civilization as politics, culture, science, and individualism are perverted for selfish ends. Even within the Church, the gospel, separated from obedience to God, becomes a permissive principle of undiscriminating tolerance to bless human desire and fantasy.

Have we "worn ourselves out with that accursed Antichrist?" No. Antichrist is not dead. On the contrary, he fuels the engine that travels down the tracks of the Mainline.

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MADAME BLAVATSKY'S BABOON: A HISTORY OF THE MYSTICS, MEDIUMS, AND MISFITS WHO BROUGHT SPIRITUALISM TO AMERICA. By PETER WASHINGTON. *Schocken. 470 pp $27.50.*

Reviewed by **Phillip E. Johnson**

MADAME Helena Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy, kept a stuffed baboon in her study to symbolize her rejection of Darwinian materialism. The baboon was dressed in formal clothing, and held a copy of *The Origin of Species* in its hand. Blavatsky accepted evolution in a sense, but she insisted it was part of a process by which humans can evolve into higher spiritual beings under the guidance of a secret brotherhood of spiritual masters. When it was convenient, Blavatsky could produce letters from angelic beings like the "Lord Maitreya" and "Master Koot Hoomi"—letters magically precipitated into her possession. These communications frequently instructed her friends and disciples to agree to her whimsical demands without complaint.

Sometimes Blavatsky was caught red-handed in forgery or in staging ghostly appearances at her seances,

PHILLIP E. JOHNSON *is Professor of Law at Boalt Hall, the law school of the University of California at Berkeley.*

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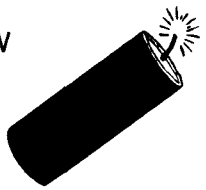

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but any disgrace was only temporary. The faithful were aware that she cheated at times, but they remained convinced that at least some of the psychic gifts she displayed were genuine. Part of the explanation may have been that her collaborators and disciples could not totally repudiate her as a mountebank without exposing themselves as accomplices or dupes, and they preferred to think well of themselves. Many of these followers were so eager to be convinced of the reality of the spirit guides that to Blavatsky it may have seemed harmless as well as profitable to give them what they wanted. As her spiritual descendant George Ivanovich Gurdjieff said of his own followers, over whom he ruled with a comic sadism, "They are sheep fit only for the shearing."

I keep an artifact very much like Madame Blavatsky's baboon sitting on top of my office bookcase: an ape in formal clothing smoking a cigar. The ape was a gift from students at the Davis campus of the University of California, given to commemorate a public debate I had there over Darwinism with the anthropologist Vincent Sarich. (The students gave Sarich a stuffed elephant with a book of "Just-So" stories.) Although I never thought of the point before reading Peter Washington's history of Theosophy, I suppose that my ape and Blavatsky's baboon symbolize something similar. You are making a monkey of yourself if you are not skeptical of people who claim to be in communication with a spirit world, but it may be equally foolish to believe that a science based upon materialism can explain everything.

MADAME Blavatsky's successor as the world's most famous spiritualist was the delightful Annie Besant, a true believer who spent her long life going from one ideological obsession to another. Annie was an inviting target for satire and yet hard to dismiss as a mere nitwit. She played a significant minor role in the politics of Indian independence, and always had important friends with money, political influence, and artistic gifts (like Shaw and Yeats) to lend support. Annie shared leadership of the Theosophy movement for a long time with the pederast Charles Leadbeater, founder and self-appointed Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church, who fixed upon a handsome Indian boy (known to the world as Krishnamurti) to be the World Teacher, avatar of Lord Maitreya, and new Messiah.

Krishnamurti in adulthood settled in a gorgeous rural area of Southern California called Ojai. He eventually repudiated Theosophy, and with it the messiahship Besant and Leadbeater had chosen for him. Thereafter he preached a pacifistic philosophy with such appealing earnestness that he became more famous than ever. Krishnamurti's social circle during the World War II years included many celebrities: Bertrand Russell, Christopher Isherwood, Bertold Brecht, Thomas Mann, Igor Stravinsky, and Greta Garbo. His closest colleague was the novelist Aldous Huxley, a religious seeker who saw the need for something better than agnosticism or materialism. Huxley was unimpressed by Besant's "bunkum about astral bodies, spiritual hierarchies, reincarnations and so forth," but he nonetheless concluded that "a little judicious theosophy seems on the whole an excellent thing."

OTHER characters in Peter Washington's history include the autocratic Gurdjieff and his rebellious disciple Peter Ouspensky. Ouspensky wrote incomprehensible treatises that still sell forty thousand copies a year. Then there was the impressively learned Rudolph Steiner, who left Theosophy to found a rival movement he unpronouncably called "Anthroposophy." Steiner seems to have had more of substance to say than the others, and some of his ideas have been taken seriously by thinkers outside the spiritualist tradition.

If Steiner was the most intellectually accomplished of the spiritualists, Gurdjieff certainly possessed the most colorful personality. According to Washington, the Theosophy of Besant and her crowd reflected in its way the sort of idealistic liberalism of the early twentieth century that brought the League of Nations into being. Gurdjieff in contrast represented "the complementary fascination with barbarism and primitivism which colors the politics of Fascism and works of art from Lawrence's novels to Stravinsky's early ballets." Gurdjieff seems to have been most at home in chaos and conflict. He possessed a knack for escaping from impossible circumstances and landing on his feet. This was mainly due to his formidable ability to persuade or intimidate people to do whatever he wanted. His method of spiritual leadership was to stir up strife and bully his disciples mercilessly while they performed endless menial tasks.

PETER WASHINGTON'S account of these characters is highly amusing at times, especially when he reports the fantastic doings of Madame Blavatsky and her successors in a dry factual style, rightly trusting the reader to see the joke. By the end of the

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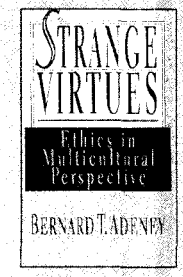

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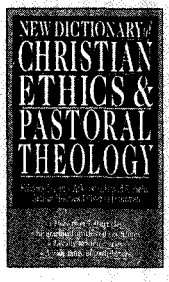

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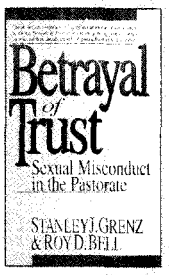

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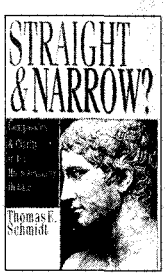

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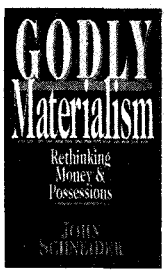

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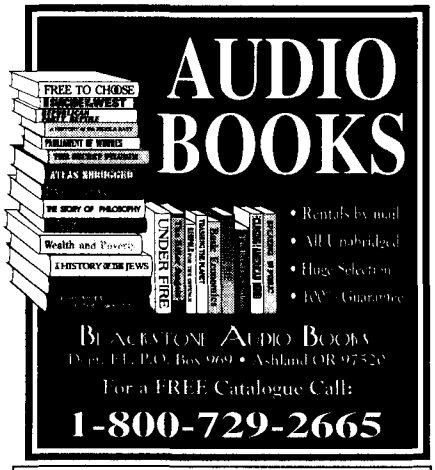
book, however, I lost interest. This was partly because the Theosophists were so tame in comparison to what we are used to in the late twentieth century: no mass suicides or gun battles, no poison gas or dynamite, no drugs or kinky sex orgies. Leadbeater's adventures with boys would stir up no more than a minor scandal today in the most respectable religious and secular organizations. Several times a week my San Francisco newspaper reports something that tops for zaniness anything Besant ever dreamt of doing. Even Gurdjieff seems almost responsible in comparison to some of the cult leaders of more recent times.

For that matter, the science-based secular religions of the late nineteenth century that attained so much prestige among intellectuals demanded almost as much credulity as Theosophy, and they did a lot more harm. Judged in comparison to some of the manifestations of Marxism and Freudianism, for example, Theosophy's absurdities look relatively innocent. If one must believe in something ridiculous, it may be safer to believe in the communications of Master Koot Hoomi than in promises of a workers' paradise or in the kind of psychiatry that Freud practiced on his own patients. May Madame Blavatsky and her baboon rest together in peace.



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Reviewed by
Bernard N. Nathanson

ARTHUR COHEN has characterized it as "beyond the deliberations of reason, beyond the discernments of moral judgments, beyond meaning itself," and defined it as "the expression of ordinary secular corruption raised to immense powers of magnification and extremity." As one who absorbed the hideous drama of the Holocaust from the hushed voices of my parents and the keening of relatives who had successfully fled, I am on this subject afflicted with an aporia bordering on rhetorical paralysis. Several years ago, I visited the Dachau camp in the suburbs of Munich, and the experience was so desolating as to be beyond tears, and yes, beyond meaning itself.

Nonetheless, the literature that attempts to understand the Holocaust is vast and growing, and has matured to the point of specialization. There is a body of work on the failures of the German clergy, another body of work on the origins of the Holocaust in race science, still another on the bankrupt Nazi judicial system—and now we add yet another work on the German medical profession. John Michalczyk has compiled and edited papers presented at a 1993 conference at the Jesuit Institute of Boston College, *Medicine, Ethics and the Third Reich: Historical and Contemporary Issues.* The participants hailed from markedly diverse disciplines, and included bioethicists Arthur Caplan, George Annas, and Lisa Sowle Cahill; theologians Donald Dietrich and Peter Haas; physician Michael Franzblau; historians Daniel Nadav and Robert Proctor; journalists Nat Hentoff and Peter Steinfels; and Holocaust victims Eva Kor and Vera Laska. There was even one surgeon, Robert L. Berger, who was himself a victim who survived the Holocaust. (Like Lawrence Langer, I abjure the term "survivor" in favor of the more honest word "victim" in describing those who lived through the horror; the word "survivor" strips the drama of its limitless evil and instead suggests a natural—not man-made—cataclysm: one Jewish physician liberated from Auschwitz observed, years later, "If you lick my heart, it will poison you.")

KIERKEGAARD wrote that life is lived forward and understood backward. The papers presented at the conference pay the conventional attention to the historical roots of German National Socialism but regrettably do not explore adequately the race science that developed in Germany in the last half of the nineteenth century. John Efron has carried out that task, however, with remarkable thoroughness in his book *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-Dè-Siecle Europe.* Efron examines the "Jewish question" in Germany meticulously, beginning with the egregious tales (carried from the Middle Ages into nineteenth-century Germany) that Jewish males menstruated, that they were uniformly effeminate, that Jews were more subject to insanity than other races. He moves forward to describe the work of race scientists such as Georg Wachter, a Dutch anatomist who studied the skull of a thirty-year-old Jewish male and published his conclusions in 1812. Wachter remarked on the large nasal bones, the square chin, the typical bony impressions on the lateral sides of the orbits and concluded that "among Jews, the

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muscles primarily used for talking and laughing are of a kind entirely different from those of Christians."

Efron recounts the work of other race scientists such as Andreas Retzius and Carl Vogt in the mid-nineteenth century who devised the fatuous notion of using craniometry (measuring certain key diameters of the head) to differentiate racial types, and by this mathematizing of racism triumphantly divided Jews into two taxonomic niches: the round brachycephalic and the long dolichocephalic. The Austrian physician (all race scientists in Europe in the nineteenth century were physicians) Augustin Weissbach published a paper in 1877 in a scientific journal confirming the stereotypes based on his study of nineteen Jewish males, and Bernhard Blechman in 1882 supported Weissbach's conclusions with a study of his own.

Other race scientists built upon this scientifically grotesque edifice to divide Jews into the brachycephalic Ashkenazis (of Eastern European extraction) and dolichocephalic Sephardics (of Mediterranean extraction). Constantine Ikow in the 1880s reclassified Jews into three racial types on the basis of evidence derived from the craniometry method. Prominent German psychiatrists such as Emil Kraepelin and Richard Krafft-Ebbing stressed the emotional fragility and the putatively high rate of insanity among Jews; Krafft-Ebbing remarked that religious fervor in the Jewish community promoted deviant sexual practices such as consanguineous marriages.

By 1900, 16 percent of all physicians in Germany were Jewish (Jews comprised approximately 1 percent of the German population), and these physicians were subjected to intermittent but vicious attacks. In 1875 the world-famous surgeon Theodor Billroth unleashed a lengthy anti-Semitic harangue in the press, protesting the admission of Jewish students in what he termed disproportionately large numbers to the German medical schools. Only the great non-Jewish pathologist Rudolph Virchow battled the anti-Semites by ridiculing the entire racial typing project and defending the Jewish physicians fearlessly. Jewish physicians such as Joseph Jacobs in Great Britain and Samuel Weissenberg in Germany took on the race science question, conducting studies and publishing scientific papers confuting the virulent anti-Semitism of the German non-Jewish medical community—but by 1900 the damage was done. Jews had been thoroughly marginalized, and the ground had been prepared for Alfred Ploetz and Wilhelm Schallmeyer, the founders of the German racial hygiene movement in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

DANIEL NADAV and other essayists in *Medicine, Ethics, and the Third Reich* describe with impressive force the progressive deterioration of medical ethics in the pre-Nazi and Nazi eras, as doctors stepped from forced sterilization of the physically and mentally imperfect through the various euthanasia programs devised first to care for the suffering and then to the more comprehensive programs designed to eliminate the "lives not worth living," the lives that were a "drag" on the racial hygiene aspiration, and the lives of the "useless eaters." In the introductory essay, Christian Pross observes that "a combination of pseudoscientific racism, socioeconomic crisis, and abandonment of the ideal of physician as healer produced doctors who sterilized or killed so-called inferiors and social deviants in the name of science." Pross states that only 350 German physicians directly committed the medical crimes, but "many more were involved, directly or indirectly, among them the cream of German medicine, university professors, outstanding scientists and researchers." In the Nazi era half of all physicians were members of the Nazi party, 26 percent of them were storm troopers, and 7 percent were in the SS—these were much higher rates than for any of the other professions. Regarding the fate of the German-Jewish physicians, Pross estimates that between 1932 and 1945 at least 5,000 Jewish physicians were expelled from Germany, several hundred committed suicide, and close to 2,000 perished in the death camps.

Lisa Sowle Cahill, in a moving valedictory to this dispiriting account of the systematic betrayal of normative medical ethics, does not tastefully avert her eyes; she calls the Holocaust exactly what it was—an unmitigated and unmitigatable evil. She marks the role of the Nazi physicians—the loyal traitors—as having caved in to "scientific bias, ideological banality, professional self-serv-

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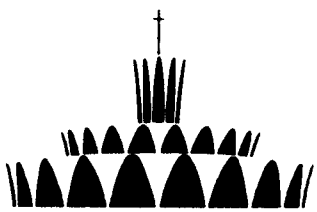

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ing, and moral vacuity." In bioethical terms, it was a pervasively squalid, unparalleled, and unimaginably destructive perversion of the utilitarian theory of medical ethics.

Unfortunately Cahill—like other participants in the conference—relies on that old saw of the "slippery slope," as though it were a logical inevitability; she does however warn that "the 'slippery slope' argument is a valid one, but it calls for caution and precision in the application." Mary Mahowald, in her consideration of the "slippery slope" argument, has acknowledged that the "slope" *does* exist but that one can control the rate of descent (and even arrest it) by driving what she terms "moral wedges" into the slope. This is not far from my own position on the subject: the slope is not a slope at all but a spiralling staircase descending into unfathomable depths of evil. At every step one has the opportunity to rest, to survey the moral landscape critically, to look back, to contemplate with great care the next step, and even to climb back up if the occasion warrants. Had German physicians (and for that matter, the German judiciary, philosophers, academicians, journalists, and even the military) taken this approach to National Socialism, it is a reasonable probability that that terrifying, dizzying descent into hell would not have occurred.

Medicine, Ethics, and the Third Reich is a powerful indictment of the abject collapse of the German biomedical ethical system during (and even preceding) the National Socialist regime. Others have written authoritatively on the subject, but none with the eloquence and force of the contributors to this volume.

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—GILBERT MEILAENDER, Oberlin College

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A Politics of (Sober) Hope

THE PARADOXICAL VISION: A PUBLIC THEOLOGY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY. By ROBERT BENNE. *Fortress. 242 pp. $16 paper.*

Reviewed by **Janet Marsden**

NO BOOK OF recent vintage has provided such a comprehensive and intelligent overview of current options in relating Christian faith to the general culture as Robert Benne's *The Paradoxical Vision.* Benne, who is Professor of Religion at Roanoke College in Virginia and very much a Lutheran, divides his subject into three parts. First and most substantively, he sets out what he means by "the paradoxical vision" in public theology. Second, and perhaps of less interest to most readers, he examines the ways in which the Lutheran churches in this country have advanced or betrayed that vision. Finally, he analyzes the work of three theologians who he believes have best exemplified the paradoxical vision: Reinhold Niebuhr, Glenn Tinder, and Richard John Neuhaus.

Writing on "The Lutheran Difference" in these pages (February 1992), the evangelical historian Mark Noll

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observed that "America has enjoyed a surfeit of Reformed tendencies and a very occasional nudge in the Lutheran direction. A better balance is possible." Taking his cue from Noll, Benne says he wants to provide that balance by nudging Christian ethics in the Lutheran direction. He clearly wants to do so in an ecumenical way that will also influence Roman Catholics, and both liberal and evangelical Protestants. Benne agrees with those who have in recent years urged that it makes more sense to speak of "public theology" than to use the older term, "social ethics." He writes, "Public theology, I think, refers to the *engagement* of a living religious tradition with its public environment—the economic, political, and cultural spheres of our common life." Although the cultural sphere has priority, these spheres are interdependent. "The cultural system, by which I mean the guidance system of the society—its coherent pattern of meanings and values (often supplied at least in part by its religious inheritance)—is heavily dependent on a modicum of economic and political stability and success."

PUBLIC THEOLOGY does not have an easy time of it in a putatively secular society. Benne employs Neuhaus' image of "the naked public square" and, demonstrating a masterful grasp of the pertinent literature, shows how we have come to our present unhappy circumstance in which public life is so largely divorced from our cultural "guidance system." He puts a very large part of the blame on the Protestant mainline that has abandoned its tradition of giving religious and moral definition to American life. With Noll, he believes American Christianity has been marked by a crusading impulse, an impulse that frequently served the country well. But now the Protestant mainline has turned this crusading impulse against itself in what Benne calls "the great reversal." In 1950, when the National Council of Churches succeeded the old Federal Council, Episcopal Bishop Henry Knox Sherrill, its first president, said that the council's formation marked "a new and great determination that the American way will be increasingly the Christian way, for such is our heritage. Together the churches can move forward to the goal—a Christian America in a Christian world."

Although Benne does not note the irony, the 1950s establishment language about Christian America is today the almost exclusive preserve of the then despised (and still despised) "religious right." What Benne does note with detailed insight is the way in which "the great reversal" has resulted in the undermining of the confidence of the old establishment. In recent decades, mainline leadership has, also with a crusading passion, pitted "the Christian way" against "the American way." Vietnam and the adversary culture of the sixties are part of the story, but in the mainline academy and church-and-society curias, the controlling doctrine is now that "Salvation will come from the revolutionary cultural praxis of gender feminism, homosexualism, multiculturalism, and militant ecological movements." Although overt Marxist rhetoric is muted following the collapse of communism, a basically Marxist analysis still drives these adversarial movements.

In a footnote that deserves to be in the main text, Benne writes: "The Marxist notion that dominant groups have arranged society and culture for their own exploitative purposes remains a key to their perspective. Power relations between the oppressed and oppressor (relations of groups are never seen as more complex) provide the dominant model of analysis. Following from this, it is assumed that those who are oppressed by the dominant group (male, straight, European, capitalist) have a particularly relevant grasp of true reality. Since they are not blinded by the ideological screens that surround the oppressor, they are able to see clearly and move decisively toward justice. Their revolutionary praxis will bring wholeness to the oppressed and, in the longer run, to the whole society. The dream of a sinless and unerring proletariat has not been given up. It has simply been translated into new categories."

Benne joins that analysis to a host of supportive citations from denominational statements and influential writers such as Rosemary Ruether and Robert McAfee Brown. In the 1960s, the World Council of Churches adopted the maxim, "The world sets the agenda for the church." Benne observes, "What better way to diminish the role of one's own religious vision than to give 'the world' religious authority? If you can't beat them, join them."

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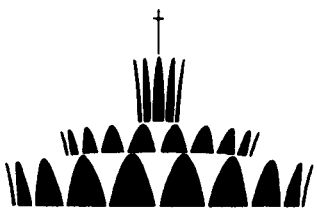

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While the liberal mainline turned its revolutionary energies against the alleged oppressions of America and the Christian tradition itself, other religious forces moved to the fore. "As the Protestant mainline has weakened, the Catholic public voice has taken its place. It has become the closest thing we have to a public church in this age of religious realignments." He is critical of aspects of Catholic leadership, but also appreciates its strengths: "While generally tipping toward the left in political and economic matters, and to the right on social issues, [Catholics] appear to operate with more fidelity to their own defining principles, not the secular ideologies of the day. Nor do they intentionally attack their own defining principles, as is the case in so many Protestant attempts at public theology." Generally missing from Benne's analysis is the increasing role of evangelical Protestantism in our public life, and its convergence and cooperation with Catholics in giving definition to the cultural "guidance system." Although he does not say so, perhaps that is because he is not sure that evangelicalism has provided or can provide what he means by public theology.

ANOTHER major source of public theology, in Benne's view, are the neoconservatives, by whom he means figures such as Michael Novak, George Weigel, Robert Jenson, and Richard Neuhaus, along with the scholars, publications, and institutions that they have gathered around them. The Protestant mainline and, to some extent, the Catholic bishops have studiously tried to ignore the neoconservatives, Benne says. "Indeed, one can read through many tomes of mainstream Protestant public theology without coming across any of the names of the neoconservative theologians, though the neoconservatives have certainly been more influential in public discourse than their detractors."

Benne describes his three exemplars of the paradoxical vision—Niebuhr, Tinder, and Neuhaus—as, respectively, a Christian realist, a hesitant radical, and a neoconservative. But one suspects that for Benne these are distinctions within the category "neoconservative." As he enlists thinkers in the neoconservative cause, he knows that he might also be suspected of purloining thinkers for his Lutheranism. After all, Niebuhr belonged to what was then the Evangelical and Reformed Church, as much Calvinist as Lutheran; Tinder is an Episcopalian (although his son is a Lutheran pastor); and Neuhaus, long a Lutheran pastor, became a Roman Catholic. "My primary purpose," writes Benne, "is not to claim these three as crypto-Lutherans, as if I were trying to enhance the reputation of Lutheranism by adding a few luminaries to its legacy. Rather, it is to show how the paradoxical vision expressed by these three has had significant effects on their public theologies." In other words, the paradoxical vision that they exemplify is significantly derived from, and best articulated by, the Lutheran side of the Reformation tradition. Whether or not the three are as Lutheran as Benne suggests—in the case of Neuhaus, Benne treats only the writings from his Lutheran years—they do represent what he means by the paradoxical vision.

That vision tries to protect the universality and radicality of the gospel from every form of political or cultural captivity. It nurtures a sober view of human nature and the possibilities of change, seeks self-consciously to avoid both liberal sentimentality and conservative cynicism in social ethics, and views history with a keen appreciation of limitation and irony—and undergirds all this with a vibrant sense of hope in the Lord of history. The paradoxical vision insists that "The New Testament gospel of the suffering God who abjured all worldly power and all worldly group identifications simply rules out those schemes that compromise the radicality and universality of the gospel. The cross of Christ freed the gospel from enmeshment in all human efforts to save the world. No one was with Christ on the cross to die for our sins. Or viewed differently, *everyone* was with Christ on the cross, but only as passive inhabitants of his righteous and suffering person. No boasting is permitted. Therefore, the paradoxical vision rules out salvific politics."

SALVIFIC politics is the demonic temptation to which both liberal and conservative thought in the Calvinist tradition too easily succumb, as do Catholics, Benne thinks, with their drive toward a synthesis of Christ and culture. The exemplars of the paradoxical vision, on the other hand, provide a theological framework that resists being turned into substantive social ethics or mere ideology. Thus Reinhold Niebuhr, after he had overcome the leftist sentimentality of his early years, found a "method of proceeding in life and thought [that] was as paradoxical as their actual substance. He proceeded dialectically, playing off one polarity against another and finding his judgments somewhere in the complex interplay of those polarities. That is why theologians of both the political left and right can authentically claim him as a mentor. Both Robert McAfee Brown on the left and Michael Novak on the right have grounds for claiming to be genuine students of Niebuhr. . . . He was willing to admit that he had changed his mind. But the basic framework of the paradoxical vision remained solid from the mid-thirties onward." (One may agree with the substance of Benne's description of Niebuhr, while wondering whether Brown's promotion of liberation theology in recent years is not precisely the kind of salvific politics that the paradoxical vision so decisively rejects.)

Tinder, while less well known outside academic circles than Niebuhr or Neuhaus, may be the purest representative of the paradoxical vision. His much celebrated textbook, *Political Thinking*, is prefaced with this statement from Soren Kierkegaard: "The paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity. The supreme paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think." Benne is

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clearly uncomfortable with Tinder's severe reservations about the morality of politics, even to the point of suggesting (in a manner that Benne thinks somewhat "sectarian") that Christians should not involve themselves directly in the political enterprise.

"Neuhaus, of all the neoconservative public theologians, has been the most prolific and energetic on a number of fronts," writes Benne. "His presentation of the paradoxical vision is the most straightforward of the three. . . . Perhaps more than anyone since Niebuhr, Neuhaus has pressed his paradoxical vision right into the midst of American economic, political, and cultural debates." That being said, Benne is uneasy with Neuhaus' "draconian" restrictions on the Church's direct role in the political arena. And it is true that Neuhaus wrote many variations on the maxim, "When it is not necessary for the Church to speak, it is necessary for the Church not to speak." Here again, however, it must be noted that Benne limits himself to what Neuhaus wrote as a Lutheran. His "draconian" restrictions, one may suggest, were in large part attributable to Lutheranism's lacking the Magisterium and developed body of social doctrine that Neuhaus has found in the Catholic Church. At least to this reviewer, the paradoxical vision is significantly modified in Neuhaus' writings as a Catholic, as, for instance, in the pages of this journal and in his *Doing Well and Doing Good*, the 1992 book on the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*.

As I STATED at the outset, no recent book has offered such a comprehensive and intelligent discussion of contemporary options in public theology as Robert Benne's *The Paradoxical Vision*. I have not even touched on the extensive and marvelously constructive discussion of "direct" and "indirect" ways in which the Church influences culture, or the careful distinctions he makes between "advocacy" and political partisanship. At the end of it all, Benne asks: "Will the 'Lutheran difference' survive among Lutherans? Does the paradoxical vision have a chance for survival and growth in the religious community that has brought it this far in American history?" His survey of the record of the several Lutheran bodies comes up with a doleful answer. Nonetheless, he has no doubt that "the paradoxical vision will continue to inspire individual Christians of all communities." His last word is thus that "Still there is hope." That may seem a wan note on which to conclude, until one remembers the object of Robert Benne's hope: the crucified and risen Lord.

BRIEFLY NOTED

THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE PROVOCATEUR: THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JACQUES MARITAIN AND SAUL ALINSKY. Edited by BERNARD DOERING. *University of Notre Dame Press. 118 pp. $25.95.*

For those of us who knew of the warm friendship that existed between Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky, it always seemed to be one of the most improbable. Maritain was a prominent Thomist, a French Roman Catholic often referred to by his friends as "gentle Jacques"; Alinsky was an agnostic Jew, a street-tough, radical activist who had founded the Back of the [Chicago] Yards Neighborhood Council. Yet when they met, probably in the early 1940s, they became friends almost immediately, joined, it would seem, only by their abhorrence of social injustice. As the letters and telegrams gathered in this slim volume attest, that friendship deepened and ripened over the years. They not only exchanged ideas, they opened up their hearts to each other, praising (and gently criticizing) each other's work, rejoicing together at either's accomplishments, and consoling the other at times of distress and deep loss. When Alinsky's first wife died in a drowning accident, Maritain, responding for himself and his own wife, wrote: "My beloved Saul, our hearts are full of your distress and agony, and what is our love capable of, unless suffering with you? Everything human is powerless in the face of such a tragedy. There is no help on earth. We pray for you." Alinsky opened his return letter thus: "Jacques dear, I wept over your letter. It has been placed in a special folder where I can always look at it. I want my children to know it so that in later years they will understand how their parents lived and died." Their exchange of letters, a moving testi-

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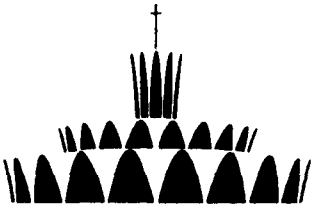

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mony to what deep, intimate, and open friendship can be, ended only with the death of Alinsky in 1972. (Maritain died the following year.) The editing, annotation, and introduction by Bernard Doering, who has translated and edited other correspondence of Maritain, are exemplary.

— *James Finn*

TERRIBLE HONESTY: MONGREL MANHATTAN IN THE 1920s. By ANN DOUGLAS. *Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 604 pp. $25.*

This is a marvelous mess of a book. The author says that she several times put the manuscript aside, not knowing where it was going. It shows. The book does not so much go anywhere as it simply piles story upon story, character upon character, anecdote upon anecdote, and laces the whole thing with usually insightful cultural criticism. What makes it a mess is also what makes it marvelous. Dorothy Parker and the Algonquin crowd, Hemingway, Josephine Baker, Fitzgerald, Gershwin, Freud, Freeman Gosden, Fats Waller, W. E. B. DuBois, and thousands (at least it seems like thousands) of lesser characters strut or crawl across these pages. Anything having to do with Manhattan in the 1920s warrants notice. I think I spotted the kitchen sink at least once. The smart crowd of the jazz age were, all in all, human disasters in Ms. Douglas' telling. They drank and preened, and drank and congratulated themselves on being perfectly unprecedented, and drank and slept around, and drank. The argument, so to speak, is that after the Great War the entire world was Manhattan, or gravitated around Manhattan. Having determined to reject the confinements of the past, painfully sophisticated white people sought to construct a new way of life by entering the world of black folk, and from that came the "Harlem Renaissance." Making regular appearances is the thesis from the author's earlier book, *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977). The madcap and less interestingly mad ways of the 1920s smart set was a rebellion against the "Titaness," the matriarchal dominance of culture since the late nineteenth century. According to Douglas, these people frequently knew what they were rebelling against, including religion that had been thoroughly feminized. When they described themselves as "the lost generation," the phrase resonated with the flaunted despair of eternal damnation. Unlike those who have posed as the avant garde in subsequent generations, the cultural radicals of the 1920s had at least the memory of a religious orthodoxy against which to protest. The smart set of today have to make it up as they go along, manufacturing both their oppressions and liberations, since they have no history to provide either. That is not exactly what Ms. Douglas says but it seems it is what she might have said had she decided to offer us an argument rather than the wonderful mishmash of *Terrible Honesty*. Readers who love New York and those who at least recognize that, for better and worse, American culture cannot be understood apart from New York will relish this book. It is a very big book, so if you are not interested in extended biographical accounts, laundry lists included, of very minor characters, you need not feel bad about skipping a dozen pages here or there. Were I not such a conscientious reviewer, it is what I would have done. On the other hand, I might then have missed much that I greatly enjoyed, and from which I have possibly benefited, although I know not quite how.

— *Janet Marsden*

COSMOS CRUMBLING: AMERICAN REFORM AND THE RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION. By ROBERT H. ABZUG. *Oxford University Press. 285 pp. $30.*

The pre-Civil War reformers—revivalists, moral crusaders, and utopians—have been a subject for all seasons. In the 1950s, they were taken as prophets for the Cold War; in the 1960s, as prophets for the civil rights struggle; in the 1970s, as prophets for feminist rights and community reforms; and in the 1980s, as prophets for the triumphs of individualism. A new study of the antebellum reformers thus assumes a massive burden—a burden to which Robert Abzug is unfortunately unequal, despite his fine earlier study of the abolitionist Theodore Weld. Abzug rounds up the usual suspects (Lyman Beecher and his daughter, Charles Finney, Sylvester Graham, William Lloyd Garrison, Angelina Grimke, etc.), and recounts the progression of their thinking with some nice nuance, but he does not answer the pressing questions or place his subjects in a genuinely new light. *Cosmos Crumbling* qualifies as the best collective biography of the reform elite now in print, but it is not the deeper fathoming of the subject that antebellum reform needs.

—*James D. Bratt*

ANTI-AMERICANISM: IRRATIONAL AND RATIONAL. By PAUL HOLLANDER. *Transaction. 515 pp. $24.95 paper.*

First published in 1992, the present edition includes an introduction of almost sixty pages in which Hollander, Professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts and author of *Political Pilgrims*, responds to his critics and brings the story of intellectual anti-Americanism up to the present, covering the variety of reactions to the fall of communism. At one level, this book is an invaluable encyclopedia of the idiocies to which intellectuals, American and foreign, are prone. Hollander gives numerous writers listed in the ample index reason to rue the reckless and frequently wicked things they have said over the years in defense of, inter alia, the unspeakable crimes of totalitarian regimes. Richard Weaver observed that ideas have consequences, and Paul Hollander helps to assure that both the ideas and the consequences will not be forgotten. Among the impressive aspects of *Anti-Americanism* is the sheer persistence of the author in wading through mountains of trash—including much that has been said and done by religious figures—in order to come up with the most telling illustration of his point. Beyond its encyclopedic and polemi-

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cal interest, however, Hollander provides occasion to reflect on what might be described as the "rational" reasons for American discontent with their society. From Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift* he takes his epigram: "What did the personal troubles of Americans amount to? Did they really suffer? The world looked into American faces and said, 'Don't tell me these cheerful well-to-do people are suffering!' Still, democratic abundance had its own peculiar difficulties. America was God's experiment. Many of the old pains of mankind were removed, which made the new pains all the more peculiar and mysterious." Those who would understand the pains of Americans, and how Americans have so successfully exported the belief that America is a pain to the world, will welcome this new edition of *Anti-Americanism.*

CONOR: A BIOGRAPHY OF CONOR CRUISE O'BRIEN. By DONALD HARMAN AKENSON. *Cornell University Press. 576 pp. $35.*

After a man's first fight for what he believes in, we listen with sympathy while he explains how the fight was forced upon a peaceable man like himself. After his second or third fight, we listen with a little less sympathy. And after his fourth or fifth, we suspect it is the fighting he loves more than the believing. Conor Cruise O'Brien has always been a fighter—in truth, more a counter-puncher than an instigator, but a man born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Much too uncritical of O'Brien's left-wing positions, Mr. Akenson's biography nonetheless recounts well the thousand half-forgotten fights in O'Brien's careers in diplomacy, academics, and politics. But what makes Conor Cruise O'Brien interesting, and what is often forgotten today, is that he can *write.* Right or wrong (and often both), he has prose as fine and witty as any writer of his generation. Rather than this biography, we need O'Brien's own work kept in print. Take along a grain of salt, but read the Irishman himself.

ACTS OF FAITH: A MEMOIR. By FAITH ABBOTT. *Ignatius Press. 257 pp. $14.95 paper.*

Those who want to remember, and those who never knew, the Catholic Church as it presented itself to an outsider prior to Vatican II should welcome this gracefully written and insightful story of a conversion. In this story, another community figures prominently, the Moral Rearmament Movement, into which the author was born, in which she was reared, and with which she believes she kept faith by embracing a faith that comprehends and surpasses

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whatever was true in Moral Rearmament. An altogether engaging tale. The author is married to J. P. (Jim) McFadden, who writes the introduction. Among their joint labors is the publication of the greatly respected *Human Life Review*.

JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY AND THE DILEMMA OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION. By KEITH J. PAVLISCHEK. *Thomas Jefferson University Press / University Press of America. 261 pp. $22.50 paper.*

As an evangelical Protestant, the author tries to keep his distance from intra-Catholic disputes over whether the legacy of Murray favors more the liberal or neoconservative arguments of our day. The word "dilemma" in the title is the center of his thesis that Murray had to settle for what Richard John Neuhaus calls "the morality of compromise," and, he suggests, Murray was as dissatisfied with that as is the author himself. Murray, he notes, could live with the public motto "In God We Trust" but not with "In Father, Son, and Holy Spirit We Trust." Pavlischek writes, "Murray was not comfortable with the Catholic triumphalism implicit in the latter phrase. But what is not clear is whether or not he, or anyone else, shouldn't take the latter if he could get it." The author is clearly uneasy about vibrantly orthodox believers who accept the proposition advanced by Neuhaus that compromise is not morally compromising. He wonders if, in the end, they are not settling for a watered-down civil religion of moral Esperanto. Such banality, he says, is "less than fulfilling" for the theologically serious. His argument would be more convincing, and his "dilemma" would be less painful, if he considered more carefully that (1) spiritual fulfillment should be sought in the Church rather than the polis, and (2) real fulfillment awaits an eschatological consummation that is not yet. The first of those two considerations was key, one suspects, to Murray's resolution of his "dilemma," and that possibility is neglected by Pavlischek. This is, nonetheless, a first-rate study, quite simply one of the most thoughtful and provocative reflections on Murray's achievements and limitations that we have had in some time. Warmly recommended to all who read in the philosophy and theology of religious freedom.

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EVANGELICALISM AND THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY. By ALISTER MCGRATH. *InterVarsity. 208 pp. $16.99.*

McGrath, a prolific young theologian who teaches at Oxford and Regent College, Vancouver, offers a stirring call for evangelical Protestants to assert a leadership role in the reshaping of Western Christianity. Key to the response for which he hopes is a rebuilding of the theological enterprise among evangelicals, thus joining "head with heart." Written before the 1994 declaration "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," the present work does not take into account the intense discussion that initiative has provoked, with the result that McGrath is more tentative about the relationship to Roman Catholicism than are some evangelical thinkers today.

THE SOUL OF POLITICS. By JIM WALLIS. *Orbis. 275 pp. $19.95.*

Tony Campolo says on the dustjacket, "Jim Wallis transcends the stereotypical political categories which set liberals against conservatives, and outlines an alternative vision for those of us who long for a spiritually based societal transformation." Uh huh. Mr. Campolo is justly celebrated by the liberal *Christian Century* as

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an evangelical who has wondrously "grown" beyond all your stereotypes of evangelicals. The foreword is by Garry Wills and the preface by Cornel West, so the reader is amply warned about how much transcendence of political categories this book is likely to offer. According to Wallis, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse—male, straight, white, capitalist—are still riding roughshod over the oppressed, but there is hope now that the Religious Right whose leaders "were the virtual chaplains of the White House during the Reagan and Bush years" have been replaced by the Clintons, and especially by Hillary, who "demonstrates the courage and competence that confirm a new status for women apart from her husband's position." The idea that Mrs. Clinton achieved her prominence, such as it is, on her own is implausible, but the suggestion that other women have a new status apart from Mr. Clinton's position is downright intriguing.

SOMETIMES IN THE WRONG, BUT NEVER IN DOUBT. By L. EDWARD HICKS. *University of Tennessee Press. 197 pp. $32.*

A biographical study of George S. Benson, a fundamentalist educator who, the author persuasively contends, was a major influence in shaping what is today called the religious right. Speaking of the conservative Christian insurgency in our public life, those who thought they constituted the mainline ask, "Where did these people come from?" Mr. Hicks provides an engaging answer in the person of a man who was instrumental in moving the country from the "old conservatism" to the Reagan revolution, and beyond.

FROM CHRIST TO THE WORLD. Edited by WAYNE G. BOULTON et al. *Eerdmans. 542 pp. $24.99.*

This whopper of a book brings together "introductory readings in Christian ethics," and will no doubt be welcomed eagerly by all who face a class in Christian Ethics 101. The selections, although tilted toward the Protestant and the contemporary, are judicious and aimed at being ecumenical. From the history of ethics, to bioethics, to war and peace, the student will find here basic texts and excerpts from basic texts that invite further reading beyond the necessary limits of such a collection.

THE MISSING CHILD IN LIBERAL THEORY. By JOHN O'NEILL. *University of Toronto Press. 136 pp. $14.95 paper.*

Welfare reform is a hot topic also north of the border. Robert Bellah says of this book, "If O'Neill's call for a second-generation welfare state is answered, Canada will be an exemplar for all contemporary societies, not least the United States." O'Neill has a firm grasp on one weakness in liberal theory, an emphasis on the autonomous individual that neglects community, particularly the community of the family. But his proposal for an "intergenerational covenant," unfortunately, confuses what is "common" with what is governmental, thus predictably ending up with a very statist notion of a more just society. As a result, *The Missing Child in Liberal Theory* is several years behind the curve of the best contemporary thought on social policy and, more specifically, family policy.

RELIGION, PUBLIC LIFE, AND THE AMERICAN POLITY. Edited by LUIS E. LUGO. *University of Tennessee Press. 268 pp. $39.*

This book of essays is additional evidence of the seriousness of Calvin College in Michigan about its Calvinist tradition. Among the papers given at a 1990 conference on religion and public life is a very helpful updated version of Carl H. Esbeck's typology of American thought on church-state relations. Also of particular interest are critical revisitings of Madison's thought on the subject (by Charles J. Emmerich) and the frequently conflicting views of Jefferson (by Daniel L. Dreisbach). In a concluding essay, James Skillen makes an intelligent attempt to draw together the diverse strands of an intelligent colloquium.

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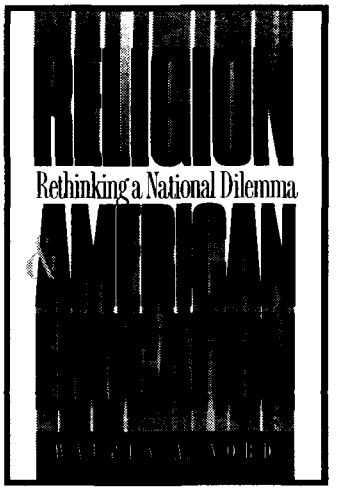

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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

Anti-Semitism and Our Common Future

With a somewhat wearied sense of necessity one turns, yet again, to the question of what is and what is not anti-Semitism. One does so knowing full well that it will not be the last time. Jewish-Christian tensions and the attendant charges of anti-Semitism are a staple in American public life, and will be that for as long as some Christians view Jews as alien and many Jews view Christianity as threatening. Of course these perceptions feed one another. At a level deeper than the perennial contretemps over anti-Semitism, and in keeping with St. Paul's reflections in Romans 9 through 11, the continuing tension has nothing less than an eschatological horizon. As weary as we sometimes might be of the subject, Christians must continue to pay attention. Jews, given their demographic marginality joined to their societal influence, have no choice but to pay assiduous attention.

The current round of controversies has everything to do with the political shock of November 8, 1994, and alarums over the perceived ascendancy of the Religious Right. As a result, some Jews have ratcheted up to an almost painful degree their antennae for the detection of anti-Semitism. A few months ago, one of our local newspapers, the *Times*, went ballistic when the London *Spectator* ran a little article on the self-described dominance of Jews in Hollywood. The somewhat naive *Spectator* author thought he was doing nothing more than reporting an interesting circumstance and, as it turns out, was in large part relying on what Jewish writers had said about Jews and Hollywood. The young man did not understand that, according to the rules of the more extreme members of the anti-Semitism patrol, non-Jews are not supposed to notice when Jews publicly celebrate Jewish influence and success. As Ann Douglas has recently described in her acclaimed account of New York in the 1920s, *Terrible Honesty* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), the central role of Jews in American popular entertainment goes back to the nineteenth century and, far from being a secret, has been frequently extolled in film and song. With weeks of letters and commentary in the *Spectator*, our British cousins had great fun with this little squall, chalking it up as yet another instance of American hypocrisy about our professed devotion to free speech.

Exploiting Suspicions

Another young man, hardly so innocent, has been doing his partisan best to exploit the political potential of Jewish-Christian suspicions. Some years ago Michael Lind fell in with those notorious neoconservatives and for some time was an editor of the *National Interest* before he decided to unleash his arrested outrage and go over to the opposition. Having secured a berth with Lewis Lapham's *Harper's*, Lind's attacks on his erstwhile friends have been popping up with remarkable regularity in publications large and small. He pushed the button for big-time attention when he rabbled the readers of the *New York Review of Books* with a slashing indictment of Pat Robertson, who, according to Lind, runs the Christian Coalition, the Religious Right, the Republican Party, the pro-family movement, and just about everything else that Mr. Lind doesn't like about America. The charge, as best we can understand it, is that Robertson's vast conspiracy is exceedingly dangerous because Robertson believes there are vast conspiracies.

Mr. Lind thought he hit pay dirt with the 1992 book, *The New World Order*, in which Robertson tells you everything you wanted to know, and more, about how the world got into its present sorry shape. Robertson's eccentric and sometimes bizarre account of modern history gives a prominent role to, among others, "European financiers" who allegedly have been pulling the strings of global politics for a very long time. Lind pounces on the fact that some of the sources cited by Robertson are also cited by anti-Semites who explain modern history by reference to the machinations of "Jewish bankers."

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That Robertson refers to them as European rather than as Jewish is clear evidence, to Mr. Lind, that Robertson is not only anti-Semitic but is trying to disguise his anti-Semitism. He is the worst kind of anti-Semite, the kind that refuses to criticize Jews. The ever-so-devious Robertson also cultivates Jewish leaders, invites them to speak at his public meetings, and has a Jewish attorney heading his religious freedom organization. Is more evidence of his anti-Semitism needed?

This is not to let Robertson off the hook. True, in justifying his use of notorious sources he invokes the authority of a respectable professor at Georgetown University who uses the same sources, and he notes that President Clinton has on occasion invoked the authority of said professor, who apparently taught him when he was at Georgetown. But none of this gets us anywhere helpful. The fact is that some of the sources employed in *The New World Order* are manifestly anti-Semitic, and Mr. Robertson would have saved himself a lot of sorrow by clearly and explicitly repudiating that anti-Semitism in his book. Even better, he should not have used such sources in the first place. The conclusion remains, however, that while Pat Roberston is guilty of writing bad history, there is no ground whatever for accusing him of anti-Semitism.

All the Dirt That's Fit to Print

Nonetheless, Frank Rich, columnist for the *Times*, picked up on the Lind article to demand that the media dig into the dirt of Robertson's, and the Christian Right's, putative anti-Semitism. Rich has been described as the *Times*' attack dog, which, while not very nice, is apt enough. He comes across as a toy Doberman in perpetual snit. His attack elicited an extended response from Robertson which, to its credit, the *Times* published. Robertson explained that *The New World Order* was written at the height of the Gulf War when he was worried about the compromise of U.S. sovereignty and Israeli safety in a "New World Order" under the aegis of the United Nations. "I do feel," wrote Robertson, "that only someone who is desperately attempting to cause mischief would make the unfounded allegations about me or my book that have recently appeared in the *New York Times.*" He continued: "All who know me, Jewish and Christian, recognize that I have been one of the strongest friends of Israel anywhere in the world. In 1974, when Israel appeared threatened and alone as a result of a worldwide oil crisis, I made a vow that I have kept to this day: I promised to use my influence, and that of the institutions I founded, to vigorously support Israel and the Jewish people. I have kept my vow. My comments on my daily television program have been pro-Israel. In fact, during the Gulf War, I was one of the few voices in America speaking out regularly in support of Israel. I have lobbied for Israel, and donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to Jewish interests and organizations. By every public word and deed, I have kept my promise."

Frank Rich was not impressed. A few days later he barked back with a column imaginatively titled "The Jew World Order," in which he notes that Louis Farrakhan accuses "international bankers" of nefarious doings and so does Pat Robertson. So there. "Our two most prominent extremists of the 1990s," wrote Rich, "are both dipping into the same well of pseudo-history that once served Father Coughlin and Henry Ford." This is high hysteria even for a toy Doberman. Pat Robertson has as much in common with Farrakhan as Frank Rich has with ordinary decency. The circle of extremists is extended as Rich notes that, at the Christian Coalition convention last fall, "Phil Gramm, Lamar Alexander, and Elizabeth Dole, standing in for her husband, all kissed Mr. Robertson's ring."

Lest he overlook anyone, Rich concludes with the shocking report that Patrick Buchanan wrote in a publication of the Christian Coalition that Robert Rubin, Secretary of the Treasury, supported the Mexican bailout to enrich his old investment firm of Goldman, Sachs. (Rubin, Goldman, Sachs. They all sound Jewish. Therefore Pat Buchanan is an anti-Semite.) Never mind that many critics of the Mexican bailout, including perhaps a majority of members of Congress, claimed that its chief purpose was to save Wall Street from its own investment follies. Never mind that in the very same issue of the *Times* television critic Walter Goodman gave a favorable review to Bill Moyers' role as commentator on NBC nightly news, noting that he injected a note "more populist than partisan" when "he criticized the bailout of Mexico as benefiting mainly [U.S.] investors."

While critics, including some conservatives, believe that Buchanan has in the past toyed with anti-Semitic sentiments, his polemics against the Mexican bailout are solidly within the mainstream of political debate.

Bigotry or Paranoia?

As one story triggers another, the *Wall Street Journal* has this big item by Jonathan Kaufman on Jews who see "a rise in bigotry." A Jewish woman in Birmingham, Michigan, reports that parents in her son's sixth-grade class have complained that the children can't sing "Silent Night," and a classmate told her son he didn't like having to learn about Hanukkah. "Mrs. Wagenheim," reports the *Journal*, "watched with growing alarm as Washington politicians proposed reintroducing school prayer." "'I thought I could be like everyone else,' Mrs. Wagenheim says. 'But now we seem to stand out more. I never felt like this before.'" Apparently it has only now occurred to her that 98 percent of Americans are not Jewish, with more than 90

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percent claiming to be Christians of one sort or another. If one belongs to a very high profile minority that constitutes no more than 2 percent of the population, standing out should not come as a surprise. It might even be cherished as a distinction.

Rabbi Peter Rubinstein of New York's Central Synagogue says, "To be a Jew is not to be anymore in the mainstream of America. You watch the Republican convention, you read the 'Contract With America,' you listen to talk radio. Before I could have accepted that, as a Jew and as an American, my yearnings were going to be harmonious. Now, I'm not so sure." It would seem that the rabbi's anxieties have nothing to do with being Jewish and everything to do with being politically liberal. For many liberal Jews, however, the two are hardly distinguishable. (Seventy-eight percent of Jews voted Democratic last November.) The *Wall Street Journal* cites other instances of the perceived rise in "bigotry." In Phoenix, Arizona, some Jewish homeowners found advertisements put on their doorknobs promoting a free video on the life of Jesus. A rabbi who represents the American Jewish Committee in Phoenix reports that a woman complained to him that her son was handed a book by a fifth-grade classmate and told, "Read this." The book was about Jesus. Says the rabbi, "People are starting to talk in terms of, 'We are being persecuted.'" A little boy wants to share his faith with his Jewish classmate. Can pogroms be far behind?

Differing Jewish Perspectives

The *Journal* suggests there is now a "role reversal" between the Orthodox and what it calls mainstream Jews. Mainstream Jews, it says, never felt anti-Semitism was a part of their lives, while the Orthodox were ever alert to anti-Jewish expressions. This is very dubious history. In the past and at present, it is liberal and secular Jews who chiefly support the hypersensitive institutional alarm systems that flash "Anti-Semitism!" at the suggestion that Jews are not just like everybody else. The Orthodox have always known that being Jewish makes a difference, and should make a difference. There is nothing new in the view of the traditionalist rabbi who, according to the *Journal*, is inclined to "welcoming the religious right and scoffing at suggestions of bigotry." "Moving to the right is a blessing for the country," says Rabbi Joseph Gopin of the Chabad movement. "The government should support religion."

Jews who are astute analysts of the American scene have a similar take on what is happening. William Kristol, the Republican strategist, observes that alarm about anti-Semitism "often does verge into paranoia among Jews." As for his own view, Kristol says, "I prefer the Christian right to the pagan left." Norman Podhoretz, the retiring editor of *Commentary* (Who ever would have thought to describe Norman Podhoretz as retiring?), observes that conservatives don't hate Jews. "They hate liberals. As it happens, most Jews are liberals." Midge Decter's 1995 Erasmus Lecture (to appear in a forthcoming issue) is titled, "Being Jewish in Anti-Christian America." If the choice is between a dominantly anti-Christian elite culture and the majority culture of Christians, it is suggested, Jews have compelling prudential and religious reasons to side with the Christians.

Another piece of nastiness that has received almost no attention in this country is a controversy generated over Human Life International, a pro-life organization based in Maryland that this spring held its convention in Montreal. B'nai B'rith of Canada launched an all-out campaign against HLI, charging that it is an extremist organization guilty of anti-Semitism. The campaign received major media attention in Canada, and some went so far as to demand that the government stop HLI delegates from crossing the border to attend the convention. B'nai B'rith also pressured the Archdiocese of Montreal, unsuccessfully, to refuse HLI the use of the cathedral for the convention's opening Mass. The prime exhibit in support of the claim that HLI is anti-Semitic is a chapter in a book by Father Paul Marx, *Confessions of a Pro-life Missionary*. Marx is a Benedictine priest and founder of HLI, and in that chapter he deplores the prominent role of Jews in the pro-abortion movement, arguing that Jews, of all people, should recognize the consequences when human life is devalued.

The chapter in question may be injudicious, and some points of fact may be disputed, but it is hardly anti-Semitic. No reasonable person will dispute the fact that Jews are disproportionately represented among the promoters of abortion, and drawing analogies between abortion and the Holocaust is hardly "extremist." Without taking a position on abortion, a number of prominent Canadian Jews courageously challenged the slander perpetrated by B'nai B'rith. In this country, Msgr. George Higgins devoted his column, which has a wide readership in the Catholic diocesan press, to the HLI affair. Msgr. Higgins, usually a more fair-minded commentator, accused HLI of engaging in a "flirtation with anti-Semitism," and says that the fact that bishops are associated with HLI makes it difficult for Jews "to distinguish the preachments of HLI from the official teaching of the Church, which clearly condemns forays into anti-Semitism." The Catholic Church does indeed condemn anti-Semitism in all its forms, but, pace Msgr. Higgins, there is no evidence that HLI is guilty of flirting with anti-Semitism. Promptly upon the appearance of Higgins' column, the interreligious affairs office of the New York-based Anti-Defamation League issued a press release commending him for his bold opposition to anti-Semitism.

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Anti-Semitism in Decline

The happy fact, documented by every serious study, is that anti-Semitism in America has dramatically declined in the last fifty years, and even more so in the last twenty years. It is kept alive at the margins by fringe groups such as Aryan Nation and by racist skinheads broadcasting their hate messages via Internet. Regrettably, it is also kept alive by institutions such as the Anti-Defamation League. The purpose of ADL is to counter defamation of Jews. If there is no defamation of Jews, ADL has no reason to exist. It is an organization that operates by demand-side economics. It has a built-in institutional need for a dependable supply of anti-Semitism in order to maintain itself. Its fund-raising depends upon sustaining a high level of Jewish anxiety about anti-Semitism. One is reminded of a recent report from the Midwest about a volunteer fireman convicted of arson. The village was going to close down the volunteer fire department, and he wanted to provide a convincing reason for not doing so. We do not suggest that groups such as ADL and B'nai B'rith of Canada are deliberately creating anti-Semitism, but by setting off false alarms they seriously reduce the believability of the anxiety upon which their existence depends.

The above-mentioned account in the *Wall Street Journal* reports the views of Daniel Levitas, described as a liberal Atlanta Jewish activist, who invokes memories of czarist Russia. "The Jews used to have a response when the Cossacks came to town," he says. "You close the doors, you batten down the hatches, and you shutter the windows. Eventually the dust will settle and you can come out again. The Jews used to say 'This too shall pass.' This time it's not going to pass." Such sentiments reflect the paranoia to which William Kristol refers and, not so incidentally, are an outrageous insult against non-Jewish Americans. The United States in 1995 is not czarist Russia and the American people are not Cossacks bent upon killing Jews. Whatever his own intentions, statements such as those of Mr. Levitas cannot help but exacerbate Jewish-Christian relations, inflaming anti-Christian feelings among Jews and anti-Jewish feelings among non-Jews.

But he got one thing half-right: "This time it's not going to pass." If the "it" in question is the freer expression of religion and religiously grounded moral convictions in public, a major and lasting change does seem to be underway. Given that this is America, such expression will be predominantly Christian in character. This circumstance is understandably worrying to many Jews, but the challenges that it entails can be explored by Jews and Christians in a manner that does not threaten but strengthens our common participation in the American experiment. This was recently demonstrated by a symposium at Harvard marking the fiftieth anniversary of *Commentary* at which Midge Decter and this writer, among others, spoke.

In the last quarter century, it was pointed out at the Harvard meeting, there has been a dramatic change among Christians—from Catholics to evangelical Protestants—in the understanding of Christianity's dependence upon Judaism. Not simply the Judaism of what Christians call the Old Testament but the living Judaism that continues in mysterious relation to God's election and unbreakable promise. References to a "Judeo-Christian" moral tradition, for instance, are not merely a euphemistic trope employed to avoid offending Jews, although that may sometimes be the case. There is a much deeper level at which Christians are coming to understand their providential entanglement with Jews and Judaism, an understanding that has slight precedent in the two millennia of interaction between Jews and Christians. This growing understanding should be carefully nurtured by Jews and Christians alike.

From Birmingham, Michigan to Atlanta to the Upper West Side of Manhattan, many Jews have assumed that the more secularized America is, the safer it is for Jews. In this view, Jewish security and success has been achieved *despite* the fact that America is a predominantly Christian society. This view, which is probably shared, at least intuitively, by a majority of Jews, is of relatively recent vintage. An alternative view is that Jews are secure and successful *because* this is a predominantly Christian society. All too obviously, there have been predominantly Christian societies in which Jews have been anything but secure. But the argument is that Christianity in America really is different, that it has internalized the imperatives of tolerance as a matter of religious duty, and that, more recently, it has come to see Judaism as an integral part of God's purposes in history. In a forthcoming historical study of Jewish attitudes toward "Christian America," sponsored by the Institute on Religion and Public Life, Rabbi David Dalin of Hartford University and Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis University examine earlier Jewish perspectives that are newly relevant to our changing religio-cultural circumstance.

A More Embracing Sensitivity

It would be a tragedy of historic proportions were the opportunities of this new circumstance to be wasted in politicized rantings against the public assertiveness of conservative Christians. In a time when we are called to be "sensitive" to every grievance and discontent, a measure of sensitivity is due also those Christians who say that they want to take back their country. With the exception of a few kooks on the margins (who bear close watching), people who talk that way do not mean that the

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country must be taken back from Jews. They do have opponents in mind—"secular humanists," "the pagan left," "the cultural elites," "the mainstream media." In sum, the people and institutions that have in the past portrayed, and still do portray, millions of Americans as dangerous aliens, as strangers in their own land. These newly activated Americans are fed up with being put on the defensive because of what they see as their adherence to Christian belief and morality. This populist resurgence is undoubtedly driven by a degree of resentment, and it, too, may sometimes "verge into paranoia." For the most part, however, it is a perfectly understandable reaction to be being treated with disrespect, even contempt, by the champions of secularism.

Frank Rich and others of fevered imagination to the contrary, the reaction has nothing to with anti-Semitism. Unless, of course, Jews and Judaism are equated with, inter alia, promoting abortion, eliminating religion from public schools, advocating homosexuality, denigrating marital fidelity, shocking traditional sensibilities, and depicting Christians as potential perpetrators of genocide. Those who slander Jews and Judaism by making such an equation are indeed guilty of anti-Semitism, and it makes little difference whether the slander is peddled by Jews or by Christians.

If our reading is correct, the political culture has been dramatically changed in recent months and years, and more dramatic changes are in the offing. The deepest and probably most long-lasting change is the rediscovery of the free exercise of religion, and the assertion of religiously grounded moral conviction in the public square. This is a change that can be welcomed by both Jews and Christians—as citizens devoted to a free society, and as children of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. This change is understandably feared by determined secularists, Jewish and other, who are taken by surprise that American history is not turning out the way they had confidently expected. The vibrant resurgence of public religion forces them to reexamine their basic assumptions about America and the course of modernity, which is a difficult and painful undertaking.

The Uncertain Future of American Judaism

There is reason to believe, however, that the next generation of Jews in America will more readily cope with, and even welcome, the free exercise of religion in public. A new study by Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *Jews and the New American Scene* (Harvard University Press), examines the ways in which Jewish ethnic identity is fast eroding. Given the rate of intermarriage with non-Jews and other factors, it is quite possible that a few decades from now only half as many Americans will identify themselves as Jewish. Jewish identity that is based upon ethnicity, anxiety about anti-Semitism, and concern for Israel is, say Lipset and Raab, a fragile thing. The Jewish future in America will be secured not by "Jewishness" but by Judaism, and Judaism is, most importantly, religion. "The central core of Jewish identity has been religion, even though an ethnic culture is built into that religion. It is that religious core which provides a special edge of separatist cohesion for Jews."

Those who have constructed Jewish identity on the foundation of political liberalism have, according to Lipset and Raab, built upon sand. "Some want to believe that an intrinsic quality of Jewish life consists of such universally benevolent 'Jewish social values' as equality, social justice, and world peace. . . . But however strongly held, most of those social values are no longer particular to the Jews, and have clearly not provided the glue which can keep the Jewish community together." As the Jews of tomorrow are more religiously observant, they will also be more socially and politically conservative. And that is because, as these scholars and many others point out, there is a strong connection between religious commitment and conservatism on a very broad range of questions.

Anti-Semitism is a very serious business. Christians, too, are responsible for seeing to it that it is watched assiduously and countered forcefully. That will not happen, however, if anti-Semitism is equated with opposition to the liberalism that many Jews believe to be the essential core of their "Jewishness." It will not happen if fair criticism of the behavior of some Jews, or many Jews, is recklessly condemned as anti-Semitism. And it will not happen if the dominant voice of Judaism in America is that of secular agencies whose stock in trade is to accuse non-Jews of anti-Semitism. Within American Jewry, there are a growing number of thinkers—including but hardly limited to those mentioned above—who point to a more promising way for the flourishing of Jews and Judaism in America. Jews will decide how their message is received, but the rest of us, as Christians and as citizens, have a deep interest in the revival of a Jewish identity that transcends the political partisanships of this historical moment.

Jews who are indifferent to the religious core of Judaism may, as Lipset and Raab suggest, be assimilated into the sector of secular Americans who are equally indifferent to Christianity. There they may maintain for a time an attenuated sense of ethnic identity, much in the way that others are vaguely Italian, Irish, or German "by extraction." But extraction means separation, and identities by extraction are by definition tenuous and short-lived. The interesting and promising future of Jewish-Christian relations rests with Jews and Christians who, in mutual respect and reverence, seek to discern and obey the will of the One who is, through

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Israel, the light to the nations, and not least to these United States of America.

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BEING RELIGIOUS IN PUBLIC DEBATE

After *A Theory of Justice*, it seemed that John Rawls was established as *the* oracle of political philosophy among English-speaking, or at least American, intellectuals. Remarkable in that light is the relatively cool reception given his 1993 book, *Political Liberalism*. Of course there is the fact that people enjoy taking down a few pegs those who have been elevated to such heights, but in the years between the two books there were significant changes in the American intellectual culture. The ahistorical and individualistic reasoning of *A Theory of Justice* no doubt played a part in provoking a rash of books that lifted up the importance of community, of "thick descriptions," and of reasons of the heart alien to the reason of Rawls. Then too, while we do not embrace the notion that timing is everything, *Political Liberalism* came at a time when the irrepressible force of religion in public life and public discourse was making itself newly felt. Although *A Theory* had occasional intimations of something that might be called transcendent, Rawls' project was self-consciously secular, and this became even more evident in *Political Liberalism*.

Michael McConnell of the University of Chicago and an FT contributor, makes this point in an article in the *Michigan Law Review*. He notes that there is a "surge of new writing about the role of religion in public life," and reflects on how this might provide something like a "middle ground" in the abortion debate. McConnell has this to say about Rawls: "In the most serious entry in the field, John Rawls maintains that a society may justly base its laws only on a 'reasonable' political conception of justice, meaning a conception that is, or can be, 'shared by citizens regarded as free and equal' and that does not presuppose any particular 'comprehensive doctrine,' of which religious doctrine is a prime example. Applying this idea to the abortion issue, Rawls concludes (without much discussion) that 'any comprehensive doctrine that leads to a balance of political values excluding' the right to an abortion by a 'mature adult' woman in the first trimester 'is to that extent unreasonable,' because the 'political value of the equality of women is overriding.' This means, apparently, that the contrary balance—treating the life of the unborn as the 'overriding value'—is not just wrong but beyond the boundaries of reasonable argument, in part because it rests on a 'comprehensive doctrine' (though why respect for unborn life rests on a comprehensive doctrine while respect for the equality of women does not is something of a mystery)."

McConnell is actually reviewing a new book by Elizabeth Mensch and Alan Freeman, *The Politics of Virtue: Is Abortion Debatable?* (Duke University Press). Mensch is a liberal Protestant and Freeman is Jewish, and their purpose is to explore whether in fact "comprehensive doctrines" offered by religion might not open the abortion controversy to the possibility of a sustainable accommodation. They survey different religious approaches, including natural law doctrine associated with Catholicism, and end up being most impressed with the Protestant thought of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Of those two worthies McConnell says, "Their position might be described as 'anti-choice,' though not 'pro-life.'"

He notes that that is his characterization, not that of Mensch and Freeman, but it is a remarkable characterization. Both Barth and Bonhoeffer left no doubt about the evil of abortion. In his *Ethics*, for example, Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor killed by Hitler in the last days of the war, wrote that abortion is "nothing but murder," for a "nascent human being has been deliberately deprived of his life." McConnell thinks it significant that Bonhoeffer adds, "A great many different motives may lead to an action of this kind; indeed in cases where it is an act of despair, performed in circumstances of extreme human or economic destitution and misery, the guilt may often lie rather with the community than with the individual." That is significant, but it addresses only the culpability of the woman involved, not the wrongness of the act. In any event, McConnell seems to confuse theological and pastoral judgment with public policy prescription, almost as though Barth and Bonhoeffer were addressing the American abortion conflict in 1995. Were they part of the present debate, it seems very unlikely that they would not support the goal of the pro-life movement that every unborn child be protected in law and welcomed in life.

Returning to Mensch and Freeman, McConnell is skeptical of a Protestant proposal for a "compromise" that will end up with the law paying lip service to the sanctity of life while doing nothing about the practice of abortion. His words are sobering: "This is essentially the West European solution (coupled with some more serious protection for fetal life in the later stages of pregnancy than we have here), and it seems to satisfy most people. Let us abolish the 'right' of abortion discovered in *Roe*, declare that all life is deserving of protection, and then do nothing about it. Under this approach, the

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protesters, I predict, would diminish greatly in number; the Supreme Court's docket would be cleared of these contentious cases; politicians would be off the hook; but the number of abortions would stay the same. If there is a principled middle-ground position, it must lie in a noncoercive pro-life policy that *works.*"

Reflecting on the subtitle of the book, *Is Abortion Debatable?*, McConnell ends with this: "By 'debatable,' the authors presumably mean that abortion is an issue about which debate is both possible and useful. I do not think that anyone will come away from this book persuaded of any particular thesis or program regarding abortion. I do think, though, that readers will be in a better position to see why even persons who share the authors' liberal-left, feminist worldview should understand the abortion issue as a question of justice—not simply of privacy or oppression—and even those of a secular orientation will be able to see how theological voices can contribute to the debate. Perhaps the first step toward having a productive debate—and hence toward finding a peaceful democratic solution—is to listen to one another's arguments and to stop attempting to rule 'out-of-bounds' those whose presuppositions are grounded in religious faith."

John Rawls' exclusion of "comprehensive doctrines," notably religious doctrines, from public discourse is, in our judgment, a not very well disguised argument against democracy. Democratic discourse is more about people than doctrine; people locked in civil discourse can bring whatever doctrines they want to that discourse, although admittedly some doctrines will be more politically effective than others, and the intrusion of some doctrines could make the discourse a good deal less civil. In this connection, McConnell's treatment of natural law is disappointing. McConnell, an evangelical Protestant, wonders whether natural law is religious at all, since it makes no appeal to revelation. "Perhaps God has nothing to do with it," he writes. But, as he notes in the same essay, natural law is divine law as much as is the positive law revealed in Scripture. The natural law claim is that God has so created the world that there are moral truths accessible to human reason (even fallen human reason) that makes moral deliberation possible among those who do and those who do not recognize the revealed truths of salvation. God has everything to do with it. It is the way He made the world and us in it. In trying to discern and obey the moral truth, one is doing one's religious duty. One does not need to be doing something identifiably religious in order to be religious. But that's an argument for another day.

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A COURT IS NOT A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Brace yourself for a piece of good news. When, last year, Oregon legalized doctor-assisted suicide "jubilant activists and sober critics predicted that right-to-die laws would spread like wildfire. Four months later, Measure 16 appears to be more of a brushfire that could fizzle, at least this year." That's from Oregon's largest newspaper, the *Oregonian.* This year, suicide bills have been introduced in at least eleven states; several have already been defeated, and none appears to be headed for passage. In addition, state and federal courts have been ruling against a constitutional right to die. Especially important is the Ninth Circuit Court that, in a decision written by John Noonan, overruled the May 1994 decision of Judge Barbara Rothstein in *Compassion in Dying v. Washington State.*

There have been complaints that media reports on the decision have made a point of noting that Noonan is a Catholic who has written extensively on the protection of life. We do not agree with the complaint. If reports on a decision to the opposite effect noted that the decision was written by a Methodist who has written extensively in favor of the right to die, that would seem to be fair enough. The unfairness lies in the fact that the media did, predictably, report Noonan's religion and moral views, and almost certainly would not in the second instance. If a judge decides in favor of protecting life, he decides as a Catholic; if a judge decides in the opposite direction, he or she decides as a judge. So you are still expecting fairness in journalism? In fact, we would like to think that Noonan's Catholic morality does have a bearing on the decision—not because of his position on the issue but because he understands that judges have a moral duty not to make up constitutional rights.

In any event, herewith excerpts from the majority opinion of the Ninth Circuit: "The conclusion of the district court that the statute deprived the plaintiffs of a liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment and denied them the equal protection of the laws cannot be sustained. . . . In the 205 years of our existence no constitutional right to aid in killing oneself has ever been asserted and upheld by a court of final jurisdiction. Unless the federal judiciary is to be a floating constitutional convention, a federal court should not invent a constitutional right unknown to the past and antithetical to the defense of human life that has been a chief responsibility of our constitutional government. . . . The district court declared the statute unconstitutional on its face without adequate consideration of

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Washington's interests that, individually and convergently, outweigh any alleged liberty of suicide. . . . 1. The interest in not having physicians in the role of killers of their patients. . . . Not only would the self-understanding of physicians be affected by removal of the state's support for their professional stance; the physician's constant search for ways to combat disease would be affected, if killing were as acceptable an option for the physician as curing. . . . 2. The interest in not subjecting the elderly and even the not-elderly but infirm to psychological pressure to consent to their own deaths. . . . 3. The interest in protecting the poor and minorities from exploitation. . . . Pain is a significant factor in creating a desire for assisted suicide, and the poor and minorities are notoriously less provided for in the alleviation of pain. . . . The desire to reduce the cost of public assistance by quickly terminating a prolonged illness cannot be ignored. 4. The interest in protecting all of the handicapped from societal indifference and antipathy. . . . An insidious bias against the handicapped—again coupled with a cost-saving mentality—makes them especially in need of Washington's statutory protection. . . . 5. An interest in preventing abuse similar to what has occurred in the Netherlands. . . . The physician's medical expertness is not a license to inflict medical procedures against your will. . . . You can be left alone if you want. . . . Tort law and criminal law have never recognized a right to let others enslave you, mutilate you, or kill you. When you assert a claim that another—and especially another licensed by the state—should help you bring about your death, you ask for more than being let alone; you ask that the state, in protecting its own interest, not prevent its licensee from killing. The difference is not of degree but of kind. You no longer seek the end of unwanted medical attention. You seek the right to have a second person collaborate in your death."

As welcome as the Ninth Circuit decision is, and as encouraged as we should be by the resistance to "right to die" measures in various states, complacency is entirely out of order. There are other legal ploys to be tried, and other courts more hospitable to the euthanasia cause. Euthanasia advocates were so buoyed by Oregon that in other states their bills dropped Oregon's "safeguards" and came out for what they really want: e.g., doctors allowed to give lethal injections, a broadened definition of "terminal" illness, and terminations of patients who have not given their consent. Having overreached in several states, the Hemlock Society and its allies will perhaps be more cautious in the future. Certainly they still think the future is theirs, and maybe they are right. The most recent encyclical of John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae,* makes a convincing case that "the culture of death" is on the move. But for the moment there are also hopeful signs that, halfway down the abyss, some political and judicial fences are being repaired.

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JESUS MADE TO ORDER

A very long time ago Albert Schweitzer was thought to have nailed down the coffin lid on "the quest for the historical Jesus." Most scholars thought Paul Tillich had it right when he wrote: "Seen in the light of its basic intention, the attempt of historical criticism to find the empirical truth about Jesus of Nazareth was a failure. The historical Jesus, namely, the Jesus behind the symbols of his reception as the Christ, not only did not appear but receded farther and farther with every new step." In the decade following World War II, however, there emerged a "new quest of the historical Jesus," this time with the quite different purpose of grounding the Christian proclamation in the preaching and activity of Jesus, lest Christian faith drift off into some kind of ahistorical gnostic myth or mystery. That quest, too, was generally considered a failure, but none of this has prevented another batch of scholars, mainly American, from launching a "new new quest" or "third quest." Writing about the earlier questings, Schweitzer said ninety years ago: "Each individual created Jesus in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a life of Jesus." As Schweitzer well understood, the traditional Christological dogmas of the Church had to be shattered before scholars could be free to proceed on the presuppositions that they bring to the task of discovering "the real Jesus."

Carl Braaten, writing in the ecumenical journal *Pro Ecclesia,* invites us to cultivate a robust skepticism regarding this new new quest. "The answer to the question, 'Which Jesus? Whose Jesus?' cannot be given without coming clean on the matter of presuppositions. There were certain presuppositions at work in the formation of the Gospel traditions in the life of the early church. Easter and Pentecost were the crucial ones. We know what we know about Jesus only in the light of Easter and Pentecost. If we ignore them as functioning presuppositions in our scholarly approach to the historical Jesus, we will end up with a Jesus who looks very different from the picture of Jesus the Christ that we find in the New Testament and the Christian liturgy.

"The pictures of Jesus in the 'Third Quest' tell us more about their authors than they do about the

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'real' Jesus of history. They are all very different; there is no consensus at all. For S. G. F. Brandon Jesus was a political revolutionary, for Hugh Schonfield a messianic schemer, for Morton Smith the founder of a secret society, for Geza Vermes a Galilean holy man, for Burton Mack a wandering Cynic preacher, for John Dominic Crosson a Mediterranean Jewish peasant, for Marcus Borg a countercultural charismatic trying to make the world a better place, for Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza a first-century feminist who called his disciples into an egalitarian community of equals, for Barbara Thiering a member of the Qumran community who married Mary Magdalene, had two sons and a daughter, divorced Mary, married someone else, and died in his sixties. For Bishop John Spong Jesus was born of a woman who had been raped, and all the stuff about Jesus' resurrection in the Gospels is nothing but later Christian 'midrash.'

"Usually I'm not so fond of the hermeneutics of suspicion, but here, with Schweitzer's verdict ringing in my ears, I cannot help but apply it. These Jesus-scholars have found a reflection of their own values and ideals in Jesus, painting his picture in accordance with their own character, or lack of it. Meanwhile, many believing Christians will respond to the plethora of exotic concoctions and novelistic fantasies about the historical Jesus much like Mary Magdalene lamented to the two angels at the tomb: 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him' (John 20:13)."

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A CONFLICT OF RELIGIONS

It's in the nature of conversations that they go back and forth, sometimes tediously and sometimes engagingly so. In the latter category is the discussion of whether a Christian understanding of the truth protects the rights of secular humanists better than a secular humanist understanding of the truth protects the rights of Christians. That was the claim made in this space some months ago, to which secular humanist William Sierichs, Jr. wrote an intelligently amusing rejoinder in the January 1995 issue. Sierichs, you may recall, turned the standard charges of Christian intolerance on their head, producing a tongue-in-cheek historical account of how secular humanists have persecuted Christians over the centuries. He ended with the plea, "Please don't be paranoid. Our past does not predict our future." Francis Brislawn of Laramie, Wyoming, was amused but not taken in. Along with his letter he sends us a copy of a letter he wrote to *Free Inquiry*, the magazine of the Council for Democratic/Secular Humanism, Dr. Paul Kurtz, bishop and founder. Mr. Brislawn wrote:

"In the Fall 1994 issue of *Free Inquiry*, on the Notes from the Editor page, the question is raised: What right do parents have to impose their own narrow and chauvinistic ideas on their offspring? (Referring to religious ideas.) Further down in this article a principle of the Secular Humanist Declaration is quoted: 'We do not think it is moral to baptize infants, to confirm adolescents, or to impose a religious creed on young people before they are able to consent. Although children should learn about the history of religious/moral practices, these minds should not be indoctrinated in the faith before they are mature enough to evaluate the merits for themselves.'

"I don't know, maybe immature minds should not be indoctrinated. But it seems here that humanists are trying to deny to others the freedom they claim for themselves—they themselves want to indoctrinate young minds. There seems to be a double standard. Is this freethought? (Using freethought in a descriptive sense and not in a technical sense.) Why do humanists have the right to impose a humanist creed on young people before they are able to consent?

"A couple of letters to the editor in that issue, one from Sidney Kash and another from John S. Dearing, provide further examples of this mindset. Sidney Kash describes how he would indoctrinate children: 'If they do not get religious training, they should be provided with a basis in science and skepticism. . . . To introduce science, I suggest reading about biology (including the evolutionary progression of animals) and astronomy. Children ages three to five are not too young. Taking a lead from religion, it is important to expose children early to modern scientific views of the world around us. . . .'

"John Dearing states, 'Children need to be protected from religion. . . . One way to teach our children is by reading and discussing humanist freethought books with them.' This sounds like a Sunday School or Bible study for humanists.

"How can humanists claim the right to indoctrinate their children while denying that freedom to religionists? Is it because humanism, evolution, etc. are objectively true while religion is not? But religionists believe their ideas to be objectively true. Paul Kurtz asks: 'What right do they have to impose their own narrow chauvinistic ideas on their offspring? Children are not the possessions of parents, but autonomous beings.' Religionists will ask, 'What right do atheists have to impose their own narrow and chauvinistic ideas on their offspring? The kids do not belong to them.'

"If parents shouldn't impose their narrow ideas on their children, how do we prevent it? Thought

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police? It's scary. Some parents will be allowed to pass their values on but others will not. This whole thing has the flavor of an in-house quarrel between competing faiths—religious faiths have always sought ways to prevent rival religions from teaching their ideas."

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THE PYRRHIC VICTORY OF ACT-UP

After all the demonstrations and all the rallies, after the endless promotions of "safe sex" and the billions of dollars spent seeking a cure, a fatalistic attitude seems to have settled on the AIDS community, researchers and activists alike. The disease has become the leading killer of Americans between twenty-five and forty, according to Craig Horowitz in *New York* magazine, and half the homosexual men in New York City are HIV-positive. The virus—with its ability to mutate rapidly—has defeated all medical efforts to combat it.

Fatalism, however, as the ancient Roman Stoics discovered, is one of the most peculiar of possible moral attitudes to the universe, for it leads simultaneously toward two apparently opposed results: toward irresponsible activity and toward hopeless inactivity. Fatalism both sets one free and loads one down, because nothing that one does makes any difference. And both of these results have begun to surface in the worlds of homosexual activism.

"This change in attitude is clearly visible," Horowitz observes. "The return of vintage seventies promiscuity has sparked a small boom in theaters, dance clubs, bars, and a variety of other venues that have back rooms and private cubicles for sex. . . . There is a new generation of men under twenty-five that simply hasn't had enough experience with the disease to really be afraid of it. . . . 'It's made them very susceptible to the mythmaking side of AIDS,' says Martin Delaney [a San Francisco AIDS activist]. 'That HIV isn't the cause of AIDS, that it's all a government plot, the whole area that I call the conspiracy-theory side.'"

Meanwhile, the older leaders of ACT-UP, after their first successes in focusing attention upon AIDS, have gradually despaired of victory. "I know that no matter how many meetings I go to, we're not going to walk out with a cure in my lifetime," one tired activist admitted. "Everybody's burned out," added Delaney, "I am; we all are."

The failure to find a medical cure has led to some of the homosexuals' fatalism. "No viral disease in history has ever had so much money thrown at it," the Nobel-laureate David Baltimore reported. The NIH alone spends $1.3 billion on AIDS research—though some critics, writes Horowitz, charge that the NIH is "an oversize, byzantine, bureaucratized black hole that sucks in federal dollars and delivers little in the way of results." But researchers have managed to do considerable research, and their "early success followed by disappointment and heavily politicized disputes over strategy" has finally succeeded in destroying the older activists' dream that they could get a cure simply by demanding one loudly and outrageously enough. "Though activists still argue that AIDS is being ignored and underfunded, that has become a harder case to make."

The only available way to prevent the spread of AIDS, as even homosexuals admit, is by a change in behavior. But the change they have promoted, the "safe sex" ostensibly offered by the use of condoms, has proven ineffective. The physical and psychological awkwardness of condoms has lessened their use, and the increasingly fatalistic attitude of homosexuals has lead to a recent rise in reports of unprotected sex—and to a rise in the rates of HIV infection. Even the activists themselves contributed to the rise. "Whatever else you want to say about it," ACT-UP founder Larry Kramer said, "ACT-UP was an incredible place to meet people. . . . It became the best cruising ground in New York. All the hot young men were there. Ask some of them how many guys they [had sex with] in the cloakroom. That's a part of ACT-UP people don't talk about."

As we remarked some months ago, the all-stops-pulled gay and lesbian campaign of 1993—marches, protests, and cover stories in almost all the major magazines—came a cropper. It was the revolution that wasn't. The disillusionment of yesterday's activists is poignant but, considering what their victory might have meant, one's sympathy is contained.

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DYING FOR THE TELEPHONE COMPANY

The title *After MacIntyre* takes off from Alasdair MacIntyre's celebrated *After Virtue*. *After MacIntyre*, published by University of Notre Dame Press, has seventeen philosophers criticizing MacIntyre's project from various viewpoints and with varying degrees of substantive disagreement. Then

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MacIntyre, as is the way with such books, offers an extended response to his critics. The whole thing is great fun, although most readers will undoubtedly think it an insiders' quarrel among philosophers. In the course of his response, MacIntyre indicates the ways in which he has become much more of a Thomist over the years. He also gets off some sprightly observations about one of his favorite bugbears, the movement that today goes by the name "communitarianism." "Contemporary communitarians, from whom I have strongly dissociated myself whenever I have had an opportunity to do so, advance their proposals as a contribution to the politics of the nation-state. Where liberals have characteristically insisted that government within a nation-state should remain neutral between rival conceptions of the human good, contemporary communitarians have urged that such government should give expression to some shared vision of the human good, a vision defining some type of community. Where liberals have characteristically urged that it is in the activities of subordinate voluntary associations, such as those constituted by religious groups, that shared visions of the good should be articulated, communitarians have insisted that the nation itself through the institutions of the nation-state ought to be constituted to some significant degree as a community. In the United States this has become a debate within the Democratic Party, a debate in which from my own point of view communitarians have attacked liberals on one issue on which liberals have been consistently in the right."

Philosophical liberals are right in seeing the collectivist, even totalitarian, danger in the notion of the nation as a "strong community." What they do not see is that the problem is with the modern nation-state. "Liberals, however, mistakenly suppose that those evils arise from any form of political community which embodies substantive practical agreement upon some strong conception of the human good. I by contrast take them to arise from the specific character of the modern nation-state, thus agreeing with liberals in this at least, that modern nation-states which masquerade as embodiments of community are always to be resisted. The modern nation-state, in whatever guise, is a dangerous and unmanageable institution, presenting itself on the one hand as a bureaucratic supplier of goods and services, which is always about to, but never actually does, give its clients value for money, and on the other as a repository of sacred values, which from time to time invites one to lay down one's life on its behalf. As I have remarked elsewhere, it is like being asked to die for the telephone company. Sometimes of course there are evils only to be resisted by ad hoc participation in some particular enterprises of some nation-state: in resisting Hitler and Stalin, most notably. And it is prudent to pay one's taxes and always just to accept obligations which one has incurred to the state and to its agencies. But to empower even the liberal state as a bearer of values always imperils those values. . . . In any case the liberal critique of those nation-states which pretend to embody the values of community has little to say to those Aristotelians, such as myself, for whom the nation-state is not and cannot be the locus of community." So is Alasdair MacIntyre a liberal or conservative or what? Stay tuned. He says he is working on a big new book that may, or may not, answer questions such as that. In any event, *After MacIntyre* demonstrates that it is ridiculously premature to title a book *After MacIntyre.*

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A REQUIEM FOR ACADEMIC THEOLOGY

Oh, what a lovely fuss it has raised. United Methodist hierarchs harrumph at Abingdon's publishing something so inappropriate, his colleagues in academic theology rail against its incorrectness, and the acolytes of Sophia claim that it is more than outrageous. They have gone so far as to call it conservative, which in some circles is about as far as you can go. The occasion of this ruckus is Thomas C. Oden's new book, *Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements* (176 pages, $16.95). Oden, a United Methodist teaching at Drew University, has more than three decades of experience with seminaries and divinity schools, and he offers good reason for being worried about what is going on. Herewith my foreword to the book, offered in the hope that it will whet the appetite of readers—and not only Methodist or Protestant readers—to accept an invitation to a requiem that, God willing, is prelude to resurrection.

* * *

It seems highly improbable that a book could be rollickingly funny, devastatingly polemical, and instructively edifying all at the same time, but Thomas Oden has pulled it off. Over the last three decades and more, Oden seems to have played in every ring of the many-ringed circus that is American academic theology. He is an explorer; he tried and tested everything. It turns out that he is like Chesterton's Englishman in *Orthodoxy* who set out to find the new world and, after much traveling, discovered England. Or, in the image of Eliot, the end of Oden's exploring was to arrive where he

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started and know the place for the first time.

This place of origin, termination, and beginnings anew is historic Christianity. Sometimes he calls it "classical Christianity," sometimes "consensual Christianity," sometimes "catholic Christianity." And sometimes just "Christianity," meaning what C. S. Lewis meant by "mere Christianity." Oden knows that to leap out of a tradition is not to be liberated but to be lost. It is to lose one's connectedness with a story, and without a story we do not know who we are. Then we can only emit the intellectual signals—sometimes very cleverly articulated signals—of our lostness. Theological education has become, in very large part, the games with which lost souls entertain one another in order to distract their minds from the thought that they can't go home again.

And then along comes Tom Oden with the good news—not unrelated to *the* good news—that they can go home again. In fact, says he, they are more at home than they know. Their trivial games, their fashions, their entertaining breakthroughs, their insights marketed as New! New! New! are all variations on themes much more interestingly engaged by the Great Tradition. Their inventions have been invented many times before and, Oden does not hesitate to point out, were typically called heresies. Not always terribly interesting heresies, to be sure, not major league heresies, but heresies nonetheless. As Oden notes, there are few heresies less intellectually interesting than today's common claim that there cannot be heresy because, finally, there is no truth about which to be heretical.

In no way is Oden despairing. He knows that we have not the right to despair, and, all things considered, we have not the reason to despair. More and more "young fogeys" like Oden are discovering the truth that is "ever ancient, ever new" (Augustine). It is called the catholic faith, and it is a feast to which he invites us. It is a moveable feast, encountered wherever there is faith, and it is a moving feast, still developing under the guidance of the Spirit. Oden is like "Auntie Mame," who observed that life is a banquet and most poor slobs are starving to death. Origen, Irenaeus, Cyril of Alexandria, Thomas Aquinas, Teresa of Avila, Calvin, Wesley—the names fall trippingly from Oden's tongue, like a gourmet surveying a most spectacular table. Here are arguments you can get your teeth into, conceptual flights of intoxicating complexity, and truths to die for. Far from the table, over there, *way* over there, is American theological education where prodigal academics feed starving students on the dry husks of their clever unbelief.

It is too simple to say that the problem is unbelief. Chesterton observed that the trouble with someone who does not believe in God is not that he will end up believing in nothing; it is that he will end up believing in anything. We live in an age of credulity, as is dramatically evidenced by the novelties—ever ancient—that provide such excitements in our seminaries and divinity schools. Oden invites us to an exploration toward faith in an age of credulity. When setting out on a great adventure, you take care to check out your travel companions. Oden is pleased to report that, after numerous disappointments, he has found a splendid company of friends with whom to travel. They have been traveling for centuries, and he has been traveling with them for some time now. He has found them to be faithful, wise, and filled with wonderful stories about the One who promised to travel with them "until the end of the age."

A number of us young fogeys—and some of us no longer so young—have been traveling together for a while. There have been memorable festivities along the way. In 1975 there was, for instance, the Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation. It caused quite a stir at the time, but today you would have to go look it up in the library. In the Hartford Appeal, about twenty theologians from the several churches upbraided contemporary academic theology for its "loss of transcendence." I think it made eminently good sense at the time, and I would not take back a word of it. But none of us anticipated the way that theme would be turned upside down in the twenty years that have followed.

The transcendence of God has been excitedly seized upon by the ringmasters of the circus that is theology today—and by nobody so exuberantly as by those whom Oden calls "ultrafeminists." God, they tell us, is so transcendently transcendent, so ineffably ineffable, so utterly utter, that no words, no creeds, no liturgies, no gestures can possibly claim to speak the "truth" about God. (It is a significant sign of our time that so many put truth in quotation marks.) It follows that talk about God is really talk about ourselves. Our feelings, our experiences, our needs, and, above all, our rage at the injustices visited upon us—this is the real subject matter of theology. In theology, what is meaningful and what is not meaningful to me has displaced what is true and what is false. Put differently, what is true or false *means* what is meaningful or not meaningful to me. Ludwig Feuerbach, thou shouldst have lived to see thy day.

Feuerbach (1804-1872), some contemporary students of theology may remember, contended that a transcendent God has no objective reality but is the product of projected human aspirations. His, however, was a happy and optimistic atheism, unlike the angry deconstructive atheisms of today's academics who turn theology into the projection of human discontents. When Oden says he is post-modern, he means, in significant part, that he is post-Feuerbachian. At least that is how I read him. Beyond human optimism and anger, he fell, by the grace of God, into the company of some very

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impressive thinkers who told him that they had heard from God. God spoke. To Abraham, at Sinai, through the prophets, and then God became his speaking in Jesus of Nazareth, the Word of God. Christian theologians have been trying to figure out what it means, and how best to say what it means, for some two thousand years, and Thomas Oden has discovered this to be the grandest, most daring, most mind-stretching and soul-stretching project imaginable. Certainly a heaven of a lot more interesting than "doing theology" with his self. Not that Oden does not have an interesting self. But he has found himself to be infinitely less interesting than God.

Funny how that phrase "doing theology" has caught on. As in making it up as you go along. Oden invites us to study theology, to think theology, to argue theology, to teach theology, all the while knowing that it is a language that, at best, only stumblingly approximates that of which it speaks. The language is not our invention. It is the language of a community to which we, all undeserving, have been joined by grace. It is a conversation and a grammar formed through time in response to the Word. The conversation is by no means over. There is a great deal still to be said. Maybe, in the long reach of history and in God's mysterious purposes, the conversation is just getting underway. But only those who know what has been said so far, only those who discipline themselves to the conversation's rhythms and eccentricities, will have much to contribute to the company of reflection and proclamation that is Christian theology.

As I read him (and I have been reading him for a very long time), that conversation is the feast that Thomas Oden has discovered, and to which he invites the reader of this rollickingly funny, devastatingly polemical, and instructively edifying little book. Do not be misled by the title. Beyond the requiem is resurrection, and behind the lament is laughter. Were it otherwise, there would be no conversation and no feast, either now or later.

(*Requiem* can be purchased by calling Abingdon's customer service department toll free at 1-800-672-1789 and asking for ISBN 0-687-01160-4.)

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WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ When an interpretation of the law binds, it is called legalism; when it loosens, it is called humane. At least that is the way Russell Hittinger of Catholic University sees the state of Catholic moral theology these days. Speaking to a conference of bishops in Dallas, he seized upon the parable of the wicked tenants who killed the agents of the landlord who came for his share of the harvest, and finally ended up trying to take over the vineyard. Hittinger concludes: "The message for moral theologians is that they must never pervert their craft by being lawyers for the tenants. When they act like lawyers for the tenants, they play the role of the scribes and Pharisees, who also wanted to call the shots by turning the law into their own interpretive tool. When the lord of the vineyard returned, the intellectual establishment wanted to wrangle over legal matters, and eventually found themselves doing something worse than that. The Pope is not going to turn the farm over to the tenants. The moral theologians insist that he must. Indeed, they threaten to take it anyway. If nothing else, they plan to outlast the Pope. And if this doesn't work, they will throw salt on the field to make it useless to the owner. But we already know how this story must end." Analogies should not be pushed too far. The Pope, as Hittinger notes, is not a landlord in the sense of owning the Church, nor are members of the Church, including moral theologians, mere tenants. But his analogy is striking insofar as it applies.

■ Race, meaning black-white relations, has bedevilled the American experience from the introduction of slavery. David Carlin, who is no stranger to our readers, writes in *Commonweal*, "This is America's third failure at finding a satisfactory basis for black-white relations. Slavery wouldn't do. Segregation wouldn't do. And this—whatever we finally decide to call it—won t do either." He then proceeds to offer about as lucid a description of the sundry madnesses in contemporary race relations as we have come across in a long while. "There are many causes for this latest failure, but one of the most important has been the assumption that there can be such a thing as a benign race consciousness. For 350 years prior to the 1960s, race consciousness—that is to say, white consciousness of another person's African ancestry—had been powerful in America, almost always producing bad consequences. The sensible strategy would have been to erode race consciousness, to persuade white Americans that race did not really count. This was the strategy Martin Luther King, Jr. had in mind when he made his 'content of their character' remark. And the strategy worked. During the first half of the 1960s the nation went through a collective examination of conscience on the question of race and, in principle at least, came to the conclusion hoped for, namely, that race is a minor and relatively unimportant category. Victory had not been won, but it was at hand. But then defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory. In the late '60s and early '70s, a combination of white liberals and black leaders (King now being

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dead) decided it was possible to have a benign race consciousness. As in the past, a person's African ancestry was to be regarded as his or her principal defining characteristic; but now, instead of considering this a negative trait, white Americans would be expected to consider it a positive trait. The United States would continue to be divided on racial lines, but this division would no longer be a division into black and white castes, separate and unequal. Instead, we would be divided into black and white clans, clearly distinct from one another but equal and cooperative, both clans being peer members of the great American tribe. To promote this equality and cooperation, it would, of course, be necessary to introduce racial quotas into schools, jobs, legislative redistricting, etc. Given the long racist history of British America and the United States, the notion of a benign race consciousness should have been seen as a kind of contradiction in terms, nearly as preposterous as the notion of a benign anti-Semitism. But black leaders imagined it was possible to combine the incompatible ideals of integration and black nationalism, a synthesis of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Stokely Carmichael. White liberals (with the exception of some Jews for whom anything smelling of quotas was suspect) suspended their critical faculties out of a desire to remain in harmony with blacks. And almost everyone else shut up for fear of being called racists were they to turn critics. Two decades later the color line is still present in American society. To this day an African-American's blackness remains his or her most salient trait in the eyes of most white Americans, as it does in the eyes of many black Americans. White racial bigotry, which once seemed to be well on its way to becoming an extinct species, is growing in strength. So is black racial bigotry. Worse than white bigotry, however, is white indifference: by and large, white Americans have lost interest in the troubles of their black fellow citizens. They have stopped listening, and they have largely stopped caring in any but a ritual manner. In the last thirty years, American life has been very disappointing in many ways, but no disappointment is more heartbreaking than the failure of racial integration. For in this case we had victory in the palm of our hands, victory over the most abiding social evil in American history—and we threw it away."

■ Irving Louis Horowitz of Rutgers is a giant in several respects. Everybody worth their salt in sociology has had to engage Horowitz at some point, whether the subject is democratic theory, Third World development, religion and social custom, Max Weber on modernity, or at least three dozen other questions of consequence. In addition to his much writing and encouraging of others in academe, Horowitz is the founder and director of the book empire, Transaction Publishers. It seems improbable that Irving Louis is sixty-five years of age, but here is this festschrift in his honor, *The Democratic Imagination*, published by Transaction. It's a big thick book in which a host of former students and others, mostly friendly critics, interact with the master. The following excerpt from his concluding reflections may help the reader to understand why so many of us salute this man with *Ad multos annos!*: "First and foremost, the life of democratic theory is that being wrong is not a crime against society or science. Nor therefore should such error be punished as such. Intellectuals as the first victims of the tyranny of absolutist regimes should be the last to champion linkages of personal punishment with scientific error. Theory is as much concerned with sensibility as structure, with feelings as much as form. How we respond to error, the civility of discourse itself, is critical to my approach. The battlefield of ideas is strewn with system builders. For individuals who are convinced that they have a special divination never before seen on the earth, only grandiose theorizing will suffice. To them, Whitehead had the answer: all philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato. For my part, I would add that all social theory is a series of footnotes to Aristotle. Second, the need to keep pace with changes in ordinary affairs requires that we start with facts and truths and end with ideas and beliefs. To reverse this process, to start with general theory, is but to insure fanaticism. The last temptation of the theorist is to fit reality into his or her model of social life. Once the researcher yields to that temptation, all is lost. Vanity replaces modesty, and the need of the scholar becomes the preservation of 'face' rather than the recognition of our fallibility and finitude. In this, we can learn much from the Western tradition in which we are as much defined by weakness as strength, or if the religious variant be preferred, sin as well as science."

■ Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center recycles in the *Los Angeles Times* the old canard that Christian leaders such as Pius XII "at best looked the other way, protected their own, were bystanders rather than activists, and sometimes even assisted the Nazis in carrying out their Final Solution." Charles Ford of St. Louis University wrote this letter to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (where the article also appeared): "Marvin Hier propagates a great falsehood about Pope Pius XII in his article 'Remembering Victims of the Holocaust' (*Post-Dispatch*, January 27, 1994). He claims that the Pope and his prelates 'at best looked the other way' while the Nazis destroyed the Jews. The truth is quite the opposite. The Pope hid hundreds of Jews in the Vatican and at Castel Gondolfo, the papal summer residence. A total of four thousand Jews were hidden in Rome. Rabbi Hier correctly points out that most of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe were in fact destroyed. But this was not true in Italy. Under the leadership of the

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Pope, his bishops and clergy, the Jews of Italy were sheltered so successfully that 85 percent survived. That is a higher percentage than in any other Nazi-occupied country except Denmark, which had a much smaller Jewish population. Let a single incident, involving the seminary in the town of Nonantola, serve to illustrate the heroic efforts of the Italian clergy. Near Nonantola was a villa harboring 92 Jewish orphans. When a local Fascist led the Nazis to the villa, the rector and his priests organized the escape of all 92 orphans, using the seminary as the main hiding place. Not one of the orphans was ever caught by the Nazis. Although the article leaves the impression that Bernard Lichtenberg, a priest who died en route to Dachau, was an isolated figure, more than 2,500 Catholic priests were imprisoned in Dachau. Of the one million Jews who survived in Nazi-occupied Europe, more than 85 percent were rescued by Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholic Church under Pope Pius XII did more than any other organization in Nazi-occupied Europe to defend the Jews against the Nazis." At Ford's parish, Bethel Lutheran Church in St. Louis, he and others are leading a series of adult education programs on the churches and the Third Reich, with particular attention to the martyred Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

■ About as succinct and accessible a treatment of the subject as we've seen is "What You Need to Know About Euthanasia and the 'Right to Die,'" a thirty-one-page pamphlet by Mary Senander and available for $2 from Life Cycle Books, P.O. Box 420, Lewiston, NY 14092. Recommended for discussion groups.

■ In February we noted that the Postal Service had forbidden in its precincts any seasonal outbursts such as "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Hanukkah." Now the Rutherford Institute informs us that, partly through the institute's intervention, the Postal Service has reversed itself. For instance, school children displaying cards in post offices can include religious themes, and citizens will not be censored as to how they might choose to greet one another. The only thing now forbidden is government displays of a religious nature. The sources of the original edict are still cause for concern, but the modest change in the right direction is welcome.

■ "We," they declared, "grateful to Almighty God for the blessings of freedom, do earnestly desire to secure these blessings undiminished for our children." That statement, from the Michigan State Board of Education, dates not from 1795—when words like these were common—but from 1995. Clark Durant, the new head of the school board, borrowed phrases from the preamble to the state's constitution and from the Northwest Ordinance to compose a mission statement for education in Michigan that sounds like a dream of educational reform: asserting the primacy of parents, local accountability, and the need for religion, free access, and school choice. Occasional solecisms—the use of "impact" as a verb, the weak locution "we advocate for the removal of barriers that constrain efforts to open," the improbable sentence "A blessing of freedom is to reaffirm an important truth"—remind us that the statement comes from our contemporaries. Our forefathers wrote better than that. But if the mission statement passed 7 to 1 by the Michigan Board of Education on January 19 is carried through, Michigan children will write better, too.

■ We don't know why Pyramid Press of Dallas, Texas—"The Preferred Publisher for Progressive People," as it alliteratively bills itself—would think this is their audience, but we received in the mail a copy of its latest tome, *The Lambda Directory: Sources of Spiritual Support for Gay Men & Lesbians*. "The search for spirituality among American adults," the accompanying flyer ominously warns, "has not escaped the gay and lesbian community," and the directory lists organizations waiting to welcome the practicing homosexual into any faith he or she progressively prefers: Christian, Jewish, New Age, Wicca/Goddess, or "alternative" pagan (don't ask). It is intriguing to contemplate that, in some worlds, Wicca/Goddess is viewed as mainline religion.

■ It is not as though the leadership of oldline Protestantism isn't trying. This from the Pacific School of Religion: "October 22, Pacific School of Religion's Fall Lay Leadership Conference, 'Revisioning the Church for the 21st Century,' examines ways to breathe new life into the church in the face of the alarming membership decline in Protestant churches. Four workshops will be offered: 'End of Life Decision-Making,' by Ellen Agard, PSR adjunct faculty; 'The Holiness of Money,' by Kim Clark, PSR Director of Planned Giving; 'Key Ideas of Other Faiths,' by Riess Potterveld, Vice President for Institutional Advancement at PSR and former Cal State Professor of world religions; and 'Partners in Preaching,' by Mary Donovan Turner, Assistant Professor of Preaching at PSR." End of life decision-making seems especially relevant to the circumstance in which the former Protestant establishment finds itself.

■ After exhaustive research and painstaking study, after six years spent scientifically gathering data and ten more years spent mathematically analyzing it, sociologist Scott J. South of the State University of New York at Albany has at last presented the public with his pathbreaking work. It turns out that the sexual availability of unmarried men and women in a neighborhood increases the chances of adultery

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and divorce, and that temptation increases the likelihood of transgression. Prof. South modestly limits his conclusions to non-Hispanic white people in their twenties. His evidence is so powerful, however, and his reasoning so cogent, that we feel confident that he will find similar results among other people at the end of his next sixteen years of study. Surely it is past time for religion to come to terms with the findings of modern social science, e.g., the now carefully documented connection between temptation and sin.

■ We had thought of a dozen amused things to say about reports of prisons that are banning cigarettes for inmates awaiting execution: healthy dying, smokeless frying, no coffin nails before the coffin, any *other* last request? etc. But as we receive more reports of the successful banning of cigarettes throughout prisons and mental hospitals, we find ourselves less amused with the self-righteous forces of right-thinking about health. As the kids say, get a life. Prisoners and the mentally disturbed, to say nothing of felons on death row, should not have their more important anxieties complicated by being deprived of a cigarette. Denying cigarettes to the condemned makes it obvious, if anyone had not noticed before, that the antismoking zealots are less interested in health than in punishing behavior of which they disapprove.

■ A full-page Planned Parenthood ad in the *Times* accused Cardinals Law of Boston, O'Connor of New York, and Mahony of Los Angeles, inter alia, of being "leaders of the anti-choice movement who have become the arms merchants in this war of words," and suggested that they were responsible for murders at (as distinct from in) abortion clinics. So the U.S. bishops' pro-life office countered with its full-page ad, which was run after some very considerable resistance from the *Times*. The ad was titled "Truth Doesn't Kill. Abortion Does," and it quoted pro-choice leaders who acknowledged the obvious, that abortion causes the death of a baby. The *Times* demanded that Gail Quinn of the bishops' indemnification office produce an agreement stating that all of the people quoted in the ad had been contacted and had agreed to have their names used in the ad. Ms. Quinn asked if the *Times* had made a similar demand of Planned Parenthood. Of course they had not. Winona Johnson of the "ad acceptability department" claimed that each potential ad is judged "on its own merits" and not in relation to any past ads. "The biggest debate (with Ms. Quinn) was over the use of the word 'abortionist,'" she said. "We felt we didn't want them to use that word." Of course not. Among the strongest signs that the pro-choice side has lost the public argument is the insistence that we not call things (and people) by their right name.

■ Asked about the prospects for a reawakening among the dispirited mainline Protestants, a United Methodist observer said, "Most of the time, I don't think we have a prayer, but then. . ." He left the sentence uncompleted. In fact, a prayer may be the most important thing they have. A recent issue commented on the remarkable new book of worship issued by the Presbyterian Church (USA). And now there is *For All the Saints: A Prayer Book for and by the Church*, issued by the independent American Lutheran Publicity Bureau. Edited by Pastor Frederick Schumacher, this is the first of four handsome volumes providing for every day of the year Scripture readings, psalms, prayers, and readings drawn from the entirety of Christian history. The same organization plans to produce soon a more comprehensive breviary along the lines of the Catholic *Liturgy of the Hours*. The first volume of *For All the Saints* costs $33 ppd. and is available from ALPB at P.O. Box 327, Delhi, NY 13753-0327. (The set of all four volumes is $100 ppd.)

■ Last summer New York City buses sported advertisements for the very "socially conscious" Ben and Jerry's ice cream, with pictures of celebrities slurping their favorite flavors. And there was Father Daniel Berrigan, S.J., with, if we recall, something called Chocolate Chocha. As our younger readers likely do not know, Father Dan was in the 1960s one of the most celebrated religious figures in America, a poet in the prophetic mode dependably railing against many things that needed railing against, and many that didn't. He was also a friend back then, although we have had slight occasion to meet in recent years. In any event, here is Father Dan back in his accustomed form. A journal called *Cross Currents* ran some articles in praise of the religio-moral sensitivity of President Clinton, which prompted Father Dan to write a letter to the editor. "I sorted through the 'Religion in the White House' trio of articles. My mood, starting with the fulsome italicized introduction signed by the Editors, was of shaken disbelief. 'Extraordinary achievements' of the Clinton White House? Allow me to repeat your list, and comment. — 'Universal health care.' As a matter of 'ecotheology' (your word, not mine), can it be maintained that the restrictions on trade against Iraq or Cuba have contributed to the health of the children of Baghdad or Havana? Or has the word 'universal' been Bowdlerized in Orwellian fashion, meaning in effect, ours—and the devil take the hindmost? — '. . . most energetic antipoverty effort in a generation' (*New York Times* quote). And according to the same impeccable source, 'the American share of the new arms deals in the third world soared to 73 percent in 1993 from 56 percent in 1992.' — Antipoverty effort? Energetic? Last month, the seventeenth Trident submarine was launched in Connecticut. Cost: $7 billion. One such monstrous behemoth, it is boasted in some quarters, can bring

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down the planet. Seventeen Tridents? Anti-poverty? — '. . . a sense that there is such a thing as the common weal.' How common? Whose weal? Again, ecotheology would incline one to take a look at campaign promises, since those roseate days, utterly forsworn. Would urge a look southward, where Haitian children and adults languish and are shipped back to die. — 'an administration whose focus is on the good of communities, from the family to the nation itself.' Including among other goods and services the death penalty? I have a story to recount (from 'Hospitality,' 910 Ponce de Leon Avenue, NE, Atlanta). 'As Governor of Arkansas and a candidate for President, Clinton flew home to witness the execution of lobotomized Ricky Rector. On the night of lethal injection, the prisoner left the pie from his last meal in the cell, intending "to eat it after the execution."' One inquires whether such a sorry episode was brought up in the course of that famous Religion in the White House amity. — '. . . a vision of justice enlivened by ultimate concern.' Excuse me, you lose me. The orotund phraseology is in the nature of a pulpit rehash, signifying, to me at least, nothing. What vision? How ultimate? And Amos no less? The incantational analogy would cause our biblical nay-sayers to blush from burnoose to sandals. I too live on Joan Campbell's Broadway. I tried out the above empurpled prose on a homeless man on my street, assuring him that the White House was 'enlivened by an etc., etc.' He assured me he'd pass the word along to the fifty or so thousand like him in the city. He too thought we couldn't have enough Tridents. Said that after all, the Haitian homeless weren't so bad off in that snazzy Caribbean climate of theirs. 'Politics of meaning' indeed. I'm just wondering whether the eminences of the National Council of Churches, along with the bishops and rabbis, have not been rusticating too long, tents pitched outside the purview of Reagan-Bush, just dreaming of the day of the Big Summons. Too long a sacrifice, pace Yeats, can make the heart a big lump of longing. Power! Please bear with the minority opinion. We, biblically speaking, don't belong inside there, bedazzled, listening to Clinton being brilliant without notes. We belong in the tents, telling the truth, a rare commodity rarely come by. Please, just take another close look at old Amos and the king's priests. Amos knew where he belonged; they knew too. Where he belonged; not in our neighborhood. Old Amos. Jaweh never promised him the Rose Garden." To that prophet-like blast, the editors of *Cross Currents* limply reply that "Society needs its prophets, Daniel Berrigan among them, just as, we think, it needs its politicians, Bill Clinton among them." They don't take back what they said about Clinton's merits as a leader of great moral stature, but they do acknowledge that "Like the rest of us, he also sins, as, to take just one example, his hypocritical enthusiasm for the death penalty attests." That's likely not the example that most Americans would have cited first. For our part, we assume that the enthusiasms of both Father Berrigan and the editors of *Cross Currents* are utterly sincere. As for Old Amos, never mind the Rose Garden, he never even got to be a Ben and Jerry's poster prophet.

■ When Judge Richard Kaufman overturned Michigan's law against physician-aided suicide, he relied heavily on the reasoning of the 1927 Supreme Court decision *Buck v. Bell*—in which Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, allowing the compulsory sterilization of Carrie Buck, wrote the infamous words, "Three generations of imbeciles are enough." An estimated sixty thousand people were involuntarily sterilized as a result of the decision. Not the least horror of the decision was that Carrie Buck, her mother, and her daughter were not by any means imbeciles. Justice Holmes was the first to suggest that they were, though only Justice Pierce Butler (the sole Roman Catholic on the court) dissented from his decision. The daughter of a prostitute, Carrie Buck became pregnant, possibly as a result of being raped by one of her inlaws. After her sterilization, she married, worked on her husband's farm, tended the elderly, and sang in the church choir until her death in 1983. Her life, by all accounts, was a life of quality: simple, kind, and good. The "quality of life" arguments from *Buck v. Bell* asserted the government's right to decide a person's quality of life. Judge Kaufman's use of those arguments to derive the individual's right to suicide is a frightening reaffirmation of the governmental power not merely to allow, but to require, sterilization, abortion, and euthanasia. Once we invite people to draw up, as the Mikado did, their little lists of those who would not be missed, there is no doubt that many Carrie Bucks would be deprived of the burden of their putatively unworthy lives.

■ For some reason, Carl Braaten (see "Jesus Made to Order," above) does not mention Fr. John P. Meier of Catholic University, and the author of the multivolume *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, in his commentary. Perhaps it is because Meier controls so stringently his presuppositions. Except for his presuppositions about the task of the historian qua historian, on which, as long-term readers know, there has been critical comment in these pages. Recently Fr. Meier delivered a lecture on "The Miracles of Jesus" at Santa Clara University in which, inter alia, he takes on the claim of Professor John Dominic Crossan and the notorious "Jesus Seminar" that Jesus was a "magician" in a mode common to the Mediterranean world of that time. In the course of his argument, Meier provides some helpful distinctions between miracle and magic, and

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contends that, by even the most rigorous historical criteria, there can be no reasonable doubt that Jesus "performed extraordinary deeds deemed by himself and others to be miracles." Meier concludes: "The curious upshot of our overview is that, considered globally, the tradition of Jesus' miracles is more firmly supported by the criteria of historicity than are a number of other well-known and often readily accepted traditions about Jesus' life and ministry: e.g., his status as a carpenter or his use of '*abba*' in his own prayer to his heavenly Father. If I may put the point dramatically but with not too much exaggeration: if the miracle tradition from Jesus' public ministry were to be rejected *entirely* as unhistorical, as a pure creation of the early Church, then so should every other Gospel tradition about Jesus, and we should conclude by confessing total ignorance about the historical Jesus. For, if the criteria of historicity do not work in the case of the miracle tradition, where multiple attestation is so massive and coherence so impressive, there is no reason to expect that these criteria would work any better elsewhere in the Gospel tradition. The quest for the historical Jesus would simply have to be abandoned. Needless to say, this is not the conclusion we have reached in this brief overview. . . . If scholars search for the historical Jesus and yet insist on downplaying or ignoring the massive miracle tradition in the Gospels, they condemn themselves to repeating the mistake of Thomas Jefferson. In his truncated edition of the Gospels, Jefferson cut out all the miracles of Jesus and thus created a bland moralist supposedly more relevant to the modern age. The trouble is, as Californians know all too well, nothing ages faster than relevance. The historical Jesus, a first-century Jew from Palestine, will always seem strange, alien, and even offensive to us. He is a person who will never be immediately relevant to our little agendas. And in that consists his abiding relevance."

■ Beyond comment department: "The Jesus Seminar, a controversial group of New Testament scholars, has concluded there is no evidence that the Resurrection was a physical reality. More likely, they decided this week at a meeting in Santa Rosa, Calif., the historical Jesus ended with his death on the cross and the decay of his body. The scholars also agreed that there probably was no tomb and that Jesus' body was likely disposed of by his crucifiers—not his followers. But they affirmed that the religious significance of the Resurrection goes beyond historical data. 'We wanted to make an affirmative statement to all those who think we only care about tearing down Christian faith,' said Robert W. Funk, a cofounder of the seminar and former president of the Society of Biblical Literature."

■ These "social summits" run by the United Nations (Cairo in 1994, Copenhagen and Beijing this year) have become massive carnivals for the gathering of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Prominent among them is Catholics for a Free Choice (CFC), run by Frances Kissling. The Holy See at the UN objected (unsuccessfully) to CFC being certified as an NGO at the Beijing conference. The objection immediately set off a flurry of protest in the media. The Vatican objection to CFC was compared with the objection of China to organizations that accuse that country of violating human rights. The two cases are quite different. On abortion and related life questions, CFC claims to represent the authentic Catholic position, which is manifestly false. More to the institutional point of UN rules for NGOs, CFC does not represent anyone but Frances Kissling. It is a letterhead organization that has no actual membership. The human rights organizations, on the other hand, have large memberships rightly concerned about China's policies on religious, civil, and political liberties. Although representing nobody but herself, Ms. Kissling does represent herself very forcefully; she was much in the spotlight at Cairo and still commands the attention of uninformed or biased reporters in this country. It might be argued that Ms. Kissling also represents her financial backers. CFC raised $1.5 million in 1994, including a grant of $770,000 from the Ford Foundation. The declared and only mission of CFC is to attack the Catholic Church's teaching on sexuality and the protection of human life. By any reasonable definition, CFC is an anti-Catholic organization. Those who think that anti-Catholic bigotry is a marginal leftover from the nineteenth century might want to work on a theory of marginality that includes the multibillion dollar Ford Foundation. (The Ford family pulled out of the foundation some years ago, protesting that it had betrayed its founding intention. In the promotion of bigotry, at least, it would seem that the foundation is keeping faith with the spirit of Henry Ford.)

■ Feel guilty about playing golf when you should be out saving souls? Horizons Unlimited of Huber Heights, Ohio, has come up with the solution—"Gos-Balls." For $29.99, a dozen golf balls with imprinted Bible verses. It gives new meaning to sending forth the Word. As advertised in *Christianity Today*, whose editors, it would seem, are not on speaking terms with their advertising department.

■ Some metaphors should be kept on a short leash. In the *Wall Street Journal*, Robert Goldberg offers an admiring evaluation of Bill Moyers' role as commentator on NBC nightly news, and concludes with this: "As Mr. Moyers puts it: 'We need watchdogs, plenty of watchdogs—otherwise no one will bark when the news really bites.'" The watchdogs tell us when to bark? The news bites the watchdogs? We're working on it.

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■ Brother Jeffrey Gros is associate ecumenical director of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and he notes in the current issue of *Ecumenical Trends* the happy turn in Southern Baptist-Catholic relations sparked by the declaration "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium" (ECT). There was a move among Southern Baptists to censure Baptist executives who were instrumental in producing that declaration, but at the 1994 convention that move was decisively turned back. The convention resolved, rather, to "encourage the Interfaith Witness Department of the Home Mission Board to pursue ongoing Southern Baptist-Roman Catholic conversation while maintaining our Southern Baptist Confession without compromise." Bro. Gros is cheered by "this very unlikely and challenging encounter" between Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics. He writes: "Given the congregational nature of the Southern Baptist churches, the local experiences of cooperation, dialogue, and common witness vary greatly across the country. This is now an international denomination, with churches in all of the fifty United States. Their role will continue to be important as a Christian partner to all of the churches. Their increased role in the National Association of Evangelicals can bring a wider and more theologically sensitive view to the member churches of that ecumenical body, as it can bring a breadth and tolerance to Southern Baptists. The configuration of the American ecumenical movement picture is always changing, and sensitivity to the interchurch agenda of the largest Protestant partner is an imperative for all who would pray Christ's prayer for reconciliation among his people." This vigorous engagement of Southern Baptists with other Christians is among the consequences that Charles Colson and I hoped for when we launched the project that produced "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." While Bro. Gros is no doubt right about the progress this represents, it would be a mistake to underestimate the number of evangelicals, including Southern Baptists, who still have grave reservations about the declaration and the directions it points. These concerns will be addressed in detail in a new book that should be out any day now from Word. Titled *Evangelicals & Catholics Together*, it contains essays by Colson, Avery Dulles, Mark Noll, George Weigel, James Packer, and this writer. (As we go to press, it is learned that two SBC executives have "withdrawn" their signatures from ECT, while indicating that they still support the declaration. Stay tuned.)

■ "Westminster," "John Knox." The names resonate with the history of rigorous Calvinist orthodoxy. But that's history. Now there's Westminster/John Knox Press. Among its latest offerings is *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, edited by Lois K. Daly, who teaches at Siena College, a kind of Catholic school, in upstate New York. There's the usual feminist twaddle in the promotional material, and then this: "It includes the contributions of more than twenty distinguished women scholars who cover a wide range of issues from an array of perspectives, including womanist, mujerista, and ecofeminist." The contributors, as you might expect, are interested in "changing society's assumptions about women as they challenge our culture's traditions," and so forth. But "mujerista"? Never heard of it, nor has a feminist theologian friend who is presumably up on these things. Having long since slaked the fires of neophilia—which is the driving force of achievement in the intellectual vacuums of the academy—we really don't want to know. Given all the books demanding review attention, we've decided to pass on *Feminist Theological Ethics*. That reflects one of "our culture's traditions" that Daly & Co. are no doubt eager to challenge: the editorial presumption of thinking that there must be good reason for believing a book may be serious enough to warrant notice. Yes, we know, we have already defeated our purpose by noticing it. But how else would these people know that we're not paying attention?

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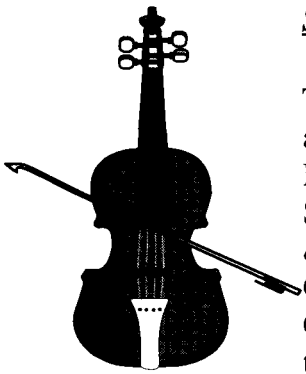

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